

B.C. wants to know if domestic, sexual violence survivors should get paid leave



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WATCH (Aug. 5, 2018): Survivors of domestic violence will get paid leave in New Zealand; here's what Canada offers

The B.C. government wants to hear from the public on whether employers should offer paid leave to survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

The province launched the public consultation Friday, allowing residents to fill out an online questionnaire until Oct. 8. Written submissions will also be accepted until that date.

Results from the consultation will help inform improvements to the Employment Standards Act. Recommendations will then be made to cabinet in the fall.

WATCH (June 28, 2019): New funding to help victims of domestic abuse

Parliamentary secretary for gender equity Mitzi Dean said in a statement she launched the consultation with Minister of Labour Harry Bains in order to hear from “a diverse range of voices.”

“Domestic and sexual violence disproportionately impacts women and girls, often with devastating and long-lasting effects,” Dean said. “I’m looking forward to exploring options on helping rebuild people’s lives after violence.”

Bains said the province also wants to hear from employers in order to understand “how best to meet their business requirements when employees are facing personal crises.”

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“Domestic and sexual violence affects people of any gender, age, economic class, ethnic group, race, or religion,” Bains said. “We recognize the painful challenge for people who are trying to keep working after facing one of the most devastating, personal events imaginable.”

B.C. and Alberta are the only two provinces that don’t offer paid leave to survivors after other provinces passed laws within the past few years. In May, Saskatchewan became the latest province to make the change.

WATCH (May 13, 2019): Saskatchewan will offer paid leave to victims of domestic violence

The province has not yet specified how many days of paid leave could be offered. Other provinces offer anywhere between two and five days of paid leave, followed by additional days of unpaid leave.

B.C.'s Employment Standards Act currently allows up to 10 unpaid days per calendar year, along with up to an extra 15 weeks if necessary. As in all other provinces, those days are job-protected.

In 2018, Canada's federal budget included a plan to offer five days of paid leave for federal employees, along with five more unpaid. The change comes into effect Sept. 1 of this year.

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Later in 2018, New Zealand passed a law offering 10 days of paid leave to survivors. It was the second country in the world to do so, after the Philippines passed a similar law in 2004.

Advocacy groups, including the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVAABC), say taking leave is often necessary in order for survivors to attend medical appointments, talk to police, find new homes and heal from traumatic events.

"Domestic and sexual violence are deeply traumatizing, violent crimes. For most people who are targeted in these ways, the road ahead may be the most difficult they will encounter," EVAABC executive director Tracy Porteous said in a statement.

"It is our hope that we will join together as employers, colleagues, family and friends, to provide people with the support they need."

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According to the province, women make up 87 per cent of sexual violence victims and two-thirds of domestic violence victims.

Just over 80 per cent of working people who have been subjected to domestic violence have reported it interfering with their work performance.

Indigenous women and LGBTQ2 people are more likely to experience violence, the province said, at a rate of 3.5 times and two times, respectively.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, every six days a Canadian woman dies after facing violence by an intimate partner. Sixty-seven per cent of Canadians say they know a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse.

The latest numbers from Statistics Canada show 26 per cent of violent crime victims in 2016 were abused by a family member. Women and girls were more likely to be victims of family violence at 67 per cent.

— *With files from Maham Abedi*

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