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March 3, 2014

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Room 281
Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

The Honourable Tim Hudak
Leader of the Official Opposition
Room 381
Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

The Honourable Andrea Horwath
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Ontario
Room 113
Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park,
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne, Mr. Hudak and Ms. Horwath,

Yesterday was an extraordinary day in the Legislature when we saw members of all three parties do the right thing, speaking and voting together to recognize post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as an occupational disease when it strikes Ontario's emergency response workers: firefighters, paramedics and police officers.

The unanimous Second Reading vote for **Bill 67, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, with respect to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**, was truly an example of our provincial parliament functioning at its best and I want to thank each of you for your part in making that happen.

However, welcome as yesterday was, we all know that the journey to full recognition of PTSD as an occupational disease for first responders is far from an accomplished fact. Bill 67 has still to go through the committee stage and be returned to the House for Third Reading.

On behalf of CUPE Ontario's nearly 5,000 emergency medical workers in Ontario, including paramedics, ambulance communication officers (ACO's) and emergency services technicians (EST's) I am reaching out today to ask each of you to work together to ensure that Bill 67 is moved to Committee as soon as possible and immediately returned to the House and that each of your caucuses vote to pass the Bill at Third Reading.

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Fred Hahn
President

ONE STRONG VOICE

Candace Rennick
Secretary-Treasurer

As you are well aware, this is the third time the member for Parkdale-High Park has brought forward a Bill to recognize PTSD for emergency workers. In light of that consistent effort on her part and now that all three parties have made clear their unanimous support for the Bill, it would be a shame to see the legislation die on the order papers as has happened twice before.

Specifically, we ask to you to act on the very timely and constructive proposal made yesterday in the House by the member for Newmarket-Aurora who urged all three parties to work together to get the Bill back in the House and passed on May 1st, the date our legislature has proclaimed as First Responders Day in the province of Ontario.

In the context of the wider challenges facing all of you in the coming few weeks, targeting May 1st to get this Bill back in the House and passed is a very prudent suggestion.

Front-line emergency workers, including CUPE members, know first-hand the challenges of assisting patients and victims in emergency situations. From accidents to homicides to medical situations, our members are there to professionally assist patients and the general public in crisis. During the course of emergency calls first responders are exposed to a wide variety of disturbing and often traumatic events, experiences which all too often leave a dramatic emotional and mental toll on these workers.

That's why front-line emergency medical workers are all so keenly aware of Bill 67 and will be watching in the legislature, as many of them did yesterday, to see Bill 67 passed on May 1st.

Let's not disappoint them. They are looking to this legislation for formal recognition of the traumatic experiences of front line emergency medical workers and the effects of PTSD on the lives of the workers and their families and to ensure they find the full support they need to cope and recover from the illness and help them return to work.

Finally, if we could raise one suggestion about how this Bill could be improved at the Committee stage, we note the remarks, also made yesterday in the House, by the member for Etobicoke-North, a medical doctor who explained that PTSD can affect "even the person who dispatches them (first responders) to that particular location." CUPE feels very strongly that the definition defining who is to be covered by the legislation needs to be amended to explicitly include ambulance communication officers (ACO's) and emergency services technicians (EST's). Failure to do so would, we fear, have the unintended consequence of leaving out crucial members of the first responder teams, members who are as much as any other, vulnerable to the threat of PTSD.

In closing, let me again thank each of you and through you the members of each party caucus for their support yesterday of Bill 67, and to offer our sincere support and encouragement to each of you to complete the journey and pass Bill 67 on May 1st, First Responders Day.

Sincerely



Fred Hahn, President
CUPE Ontario



Jeff Van Pelt, Chair
CUPE Ambulance Committee of Ontario

c.c.: J. Milloy; J. Wilson; G. Bisson; C. DiNovo; F. Klees; Dr. S. Qaadri