



MEDIA RELEASE

Ontario Nurses' Association

Ontario Nurses' Association Files Charter Challenge of Bill 124

Bill will worsen hallway health care, discriminate against women

TORONTO, December 17, 2019 – Gravely concerned about the impact of Bill 124 on the quality of health care and safety, the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is filing a Charter challenge of the Progressive Conservative government's Bill 124, *An Act to implement moderation measures in respect of compensation in Ontario's public sector*.

"As the union representing registered nurses and health-care professionals in Ontario, ONA believes Bill 124 discriminates against nurses and all Ontarians," says ONA President Vicki McKenna, RN. "This legislation is nothing but a continued attack on the right to free collective bargaining without interference, as was affirmed in 2015 in a Supreme Court of Canada ruling. More alarming is the fact that this legislation could likely deepen the already serious nursing shortage in Ontario, and have negative effects on health care and public safety."

Bill 124, passed last month by government, imposes a three-year period of "moderation" in the form of salary and compensation caps for many nurses and other public-sector employees. The three-year timeframe in which ONA nurses in various Bargaining Units will be under wage "moderation" will span at least a six-year period, during which the province's fiscal situation will vary – casting doubt on government's claim of a current fiscal "crisis."

ONA notes that nurses are a predominantly female profession and the legislation specifically exempts male-dominated professionals, such as police and firefighters. "This legislation is an attack on nurses and an attack on women," says McKenna. "By forcing front-line nurses and health-care professionals to accept compensation increases that fall below the rate of inflation, this bill will only worsen what is already a serious nursing shortage in Ontario and worsen hallway health care."

McKenna also notes that contrary to statements from government that public-sector wages need to be reined in, Ontario's nurses have experienced a *cut* to real wages of more than four per cent over the past decade.

"ONA and other health-sector employers are best positioned to identify and collectively negotiate their own agreements, including compensation, which will also help efforts to recruit and retain nurses," she notes. "Ignoring workers' constitutional rights and trying to impose wage suppression, mostly on women, is unjustified and unhelpful. If government is serious about ending hallway health care, this isn't the way."

ONA is the union representing more than 68,000 front-line registered nurses and health-care professionals as well as more than 18,000 nursing student affiliates providing care in Ontario hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, industry and clinics.

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