

ALERT

To all BCGEU members
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Government scheme to centralize health services may lead to more privatization and layoffs, union warns

BCGEU asks for details of plan, as part of talks with government in the wake of Supreme Court decision on Bill 29

The B.C. government's announcement today of a new public agency with a sweeping mandate to centralize health services may prompt a new wave of privatization, the BCGEU warned today.

The new Health Authority Shared Services organization — run by the health ministry and B.C.'s six health authorities — is targeting payroll, information technology, purchasing and other services in the health sector for centralization and possible privatization.

Even though these plans have been in development for the last eight months, government representatives chose not to disclose them to health unions until this week, despite repeated requests for information during talks on the implementation of last June's Supreme Court of Canada decision on Bill 29.

"This bombshell by the provincial government places into question whether they are truly committed to the Supreme Court-mandated consultation process," said Heyman. "Dropping this on the table at the last minute, after months of planning in secret, demonstrates a significant lack of respect and commitment to their obligation to consult with affected unions.

"The BCGEU has issued a written request to the Health Employers' Bargaining Association to provide

specific information of which services will be affected, so that we may inform our members and prepare the union's response."

The failure of the B.C. government to consult with health unions on issues that affect their members' collective bargaining rights was central to the ruling which struck down key sections of the 2002 law.

Bill 29 rewrote health care collective agreements and resulted in the layoff of thousands of workers — mostly women — to make way for privatization.

In its decision, the Court established collective bargaining as a right protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a result of this decision, there is an obligation by government to engage in meaningful consultations and good faith negotiations.

Heyman noted that the secrecy leading up to today's announcement shows that the B.C. government seems to have learned little from the Court decision — or from five years of failed privatization experiments.

The multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association has been in talks with government on the implementation of the Bill 29 ruling since early October.



B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union