



Jeff Burch

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Christine Elliot
Ministry of Health
5th Floor
777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

OPEN LETTER

November 19, 2020

Dear Minister Elliot,

I am writing to you today regarding an urgent ongoing situation within the Niagara Health System.

It has come to my attention that NHS staff are being sent home without pay when exposed to COVID-19. It is my understanding that your Ministry has directed this change and that Niagara Health can no longer do straight pay for staff directed by the employer to go into isolation.

This practice is a marked departure from the province's direction during the first wave, where staff in self-isolation would continue to receive their full pay. We have heard from front-line hospital staff who report that after being exposed to COVID in the line of duty, they are sent home without pay. Workers who are exposed outside of work, whether due to exposure to a child who is sent home from school with symptoms or from community exposure and self-report symptoms and are now being sent home without pay. Only in the event that a front-line worker tests positive do they have the ability to apply for WSIB.

This action has the potential for dangerous consequences in our community. Your government often talks about the hard work done by nurses, doctors, personal support workers and other front-line health care workers on the front line, correctly calling them 'heroes.' Yet, the actions from your Ministry now put them in an impossible situation.

In my experience, the vast majority of families in this province cannot afford to go without an entire paycheck unexpectedly. One can clearly see the difficult decision a worker would face; to self-report possible exposure with the knowledge that doing so may mean your family cannot get by financially that month.

Sending front-line workers home without pay shows flagrant disrespect for their work, livelihood, and safety. Beyond the safety of the workers, it creates a door for exposure in our hospitals and community.

I am requesting that you immediately reverse this change and provide our health system with adequate funding necessary to continue their important work by ensuring staff who require self-isolation are able to do so without the risk of personal economic consequences. The NHS and its staff continue to provide exemplary care under challenging circumstances. I would request that you support them in this endeavour by reversing this threat to their work and financial stability.

If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out. We have spoken to many staff who are willing to discuss with you the ramifications this decision has on their work, and we are happy to facilitate those discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Burch', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jeff Burch
MPP, Niagara Centre