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NEWS RELEASE

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Minister of Social Services refuses to meet with SGEU

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The Minister of Social Services is refusing to meet with SGEU to discuss a growing number of vacant Social Services positions, according to SGEU.

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In October, the Ministry of Social Services identified more than 30 vacant positions in its northern service area. Since then, government has posted 60 positions in Social Services, but despite a severe shortage of Social Services employees in the north, most new hires are in the southern and central areas of the province. Only 12 new positions are in communities north of Prince Albert, and seven of those are part-time or term jobs.

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In a letter received by SGEU on Jan. 3, Social Services Minister Tina Beaudry-Mellor canceled a meeting with SGEU that had been scheduled for Jan. 10, saying that “these issues should be raised at [the bargaining] table.”

“Properly staffing the ministry isn’t an issue that can or will be dealt with in bargaining,” says SGEU President Bob Bymoan. “This is an issue of the ministry needing to recognize necessary staffing levels, and ensure they are met, so that proper services can be provided to clients. We can only negotiate on behalf of the ministry’s workers while at the bargaining table; we can’t compel it to hire more people.”

A survey of SGEU members who work in Social Services, conducted by an independent research company, found that almost 90 percent of workers say their workplaces are not adequately staffed on a consistent basis, resulting in increased workloads. Almost six out of 10 workers say their workload issues are caused by unfilled staff positions, and eight out of 10 workers say that job cuts between 2010 and 2014 – which resulted in the loss of 76 full-time equivalent jobs from the Ministry of Social Services – has meant a loss of frontline staff that negatively impacted clients in their work area.

The fact that most of the vacancies are in northern Saskatchewan is especially disconcerting, says Bymoan.

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“Northern communities are dealing with tragic losses,” he says. “They’re grappling with severe and complex social problems, including devastating suicides among young people. For these reasons, the number of vacancies in the north is especially alarming, and the ministry should be taking immediate steps to fill these vacancies to ensure the critical needs of northerners are met.”

Bymoer says the ministry could benefit from a meeting with SGEU, whose members are on the frontlines providing support, programs and services to people.

“It’s disturbing that the minister doesn’t want to work with us to find solutions to a problem that affects not only service providers, but the most vulnerable people in this province. We urge her to reconsider.”

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