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(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

27 July 2011

Workers Compensation Board Agrees to Hear Hunger Striker

(TORONTO) – Injured worker Jimmy Velgakis ended his hunger strike today when WSIB Chair Steve Mahoney intervened at the request of Sid Ryan, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Mr. Velgakis camped in front of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal for eight days without eating. He vowed not to leave as long as he lived, until he was given a date for a full and fair hearing. WSIB Chairman Mahoney came out to meet Mr. Velgakis today. Velgakis legal representative, Marion Endicott, asked the Board to use its power to reconsider its decision and give Mr. Velgakis a new hearing where all of the facts could be explored, including the evidence of a witness that was previously excluded by the Tribunal.

Chair Mahoney agreed to this request and confirmed that the workers' compensation board would reopen the case and hold a full review on a date to be set in discussion with Ms. Endicott. Mahoney said he could not predict the outcome but assured Mr. Velgakis that there will be a full and fair review. Mr. Velgakis said that all he wanted was a fair hearing of his case and he was satisfied with Mr. Mahoney's commitment.

Mr. Velgakis injured his back working for the City of North York in 1991. He reported the injury and then struggled to keep working for nearly two years with the help of his co-workers. He turned to the WSIB for help when he was let go because his employer could no longer accommodate his back condition. The WSIB decided that his ongoing back problems were not related to the accident and the Appeals Tribunal upheld that decision.

Looking forward to a fresh look at his case, Jimmy Velgakis went home to enjoy a warm shower and a good meal and to reflect on his twenty year struggle for justice.

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