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**WSIB Providing a Financial Bonanza to Employers, While Injured Workers Continue to Get Short-Changed**

**THUNDER BAY** – The Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups (ONIWG) is calling on the WSIB to stop the unprecedented financial handouts to Employers. ONIWG also demands that the WSIB immediately increase the 2022 cost-of-living adjustment for injured workers from 2.7% to 4.7% and wage-loss benefits from 85% to 90% of net average earnings.

On June 6, the WSIB announced that eligible businesses can now have 100% of their WSIB premiums returned by simply participating in the Health and Safety Excellence Program. Previously, there was a 75% cap on rebates to Employers for their participation in the program. A new “pandemic bonus” was also announced that will double rebates to businesses for each health and safety topic completed. Since 2020, the WSIB states that it has dished out more than \$21 million in rebates. That number is set to skyrocket with these changes.

“The WSIB’s position that it is responsible to provide a financial windfall to business as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic sets a very dangerous precedent. The WSIB was established to provide fair and just compensation to injured workers, not to refund premiums to business during times of economic uncertainty. Ultimately, the WSIB survived the Great Depression and the Great Recession without historic giveaways to business – the COVID-19 pandemic should not be any different”, says ONIWG Vice President Willy Noiles.

It is also concerning that the WSIB does not require any evidence that businesses receiving the refunds and rebates are unprofitable, considering that part of the WSIB’s rationale in providing the giveaways to employers is to assist in “recovery from the pandemic.” As a result of this no strings attached approach, highly profitable companies will receive thousands in rebates. This is even more outrageous due to the fact that injured workers are often forced to provide mountains of medical evidence to (potentially) have their claims accepted.

These handouts to the business community follow a pattern of financial gifts to employers by the government and WSIB. For instance, premium rates paid by employers averaged \$2.59 per \$100 of insurable earnings in 2016. By 2022, the average premium rate per \$100 of insurable earnings dropped to \$1.30, a decline of 50%. On top of historic premium reductions, Employers were provided a rebate of up to \$1.5 billion due to the so-called WSIB surplus that was achieved on the backs of injured workers through the process of deeming, denying and limiting claims based on pre-existing conditions, sending workers back to work prematurely and by underpaying benefits.

Eugene Lefrancois, Treasurer of ONIWG, says: “while the WSIB continues to open the financial floodgates to employers, it also continues to ignore the demands of injured workers, further alienating a group already on the margins of society.” We repeat our demand for the WSIB to follow the law and its own policy and increase the 2022 cost-of-living adjustment from 2.7% to 4.7%. The WSIB has misapplied the law, and in the process, underpaid thousands of injured workers. ONIWG also continues to demand that the WSIB immediately increase wage-loss benefits for injured workers to 90%, in line with the rates in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and previously Ontario before the rate was cut. These demands can alleviate some of the pressures that injured workers are experiencing as a result of unprecedented increases in the cost-of-living.

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