



**Written Submission to the Ontario Standing
Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs**

Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017

By
Alan Spacek – Mayor of Kapuskasing
President of FONOM

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The Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM) appreciates having the opportunity to provide comments on Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017. As a representative of 110 municipal governments across Northeastern Ontario, it is important that the Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs take our comments on the legislation into consideration.

FONOM is a membership-based association that is the unified voice of Northeastern Ontario, representing and advocating on behalf of 110 cities, towns and municipalities. Our mission is to improve the economic and social quality of life for all Northerners and to ensure the future of our youth.

While we support the intent of the legislation and believe that there are several aspects of the Bill that will help to provide a fair work environment to all Ontario workers, we also believe there are sections that are aimed at the non-municipal sector and thus will have negative impacts on the fiscal health of communities. It is important to remember that municipal employees are not precarious workers. The municipal sector is a unique employer and very different from other employers as the variety of work is extensive and municipal employers must operate under a strict legislative and regulatory environment.

We were pleased to see a number of amendments to the legislation including the exception made for employees that are required to respond to an emergency or public safety concern that would have been allowed to refuse a request or a demand to work if the demand was made less than 96 hours before the time he or she would commence work.

However, the focus of our submission is on three exemptions and the need for clarification.

- **An exemption for municipal employees who are required to be on call to provide public safety and public health services.** Over 80 percent of our membership consists of municipalities that have a population under 5,000 and thus have few full-time staff. There may be one staff person who is responsible for emergency management and being on call is part of the job. This proposed change would burden municipalities with significant financial costs to meet the requirement. The exemption would also need to go beyond emergency services such as police, fire and paramedics and also include those responsible for waste water operations, long-term care, municipal airport operations, ect.

- **Include an exemption for volunteer firefighters for equal pay for equal work provisions of full-time firefighters.** Non-union positions must continue to be treated as such, particularly when it comes to composite firefighter departments which many communities depend on to provided mandated services.
- **There must be clarification that public health and safety legislation take priority over the provisions this Bill.** It is imperative that any requirement outlined in Bill 148 does not override the statutory obligations that municipal governments are mandated to provide.

One community in particular that has analyzed the potential changes and subsequent costs within their budget deliberations has determined that it would double their on-call costs for the municipality. Potential changes outlined in this legislation will have substantial costs to municipalities and must be taken into consideration. Even more detrimental to communities is that with the significant cost implications, there will be no increase in the services provided to residents, potentially decreases in services.

In conclusion, while FONOM recognizes the intent of the legislation and supports ensuring workers are fairly compensated for the work that they do, FONOM also recognizes that municipal governments are an employer of choice, with a history of providing fair wages and other benefits.

It is important that the legislation be targeted to sectors where workers typically do not experience the same level of job stability and a wage that reflects the work that they do. The legislation, as currently written, will negatively impact municipal governments, driving up costs and ultimately affecting the ability to provide programs and services to the community.