

August 21, 2026

The Honourable David Piccini
Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
400 University Avenue, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7
Sent via email: minister.mlitsd@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Piccini:

Re: Closure of WSIB Offices and Service Delivery in Northeastern Ontario

On behalf of the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities and our 110 member municipalities, I am writing to express our serious concern regarding the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's decision to close regional offices and consolidate claims, account-management and administrative services in larger urban centres.

The closure of WSIB offices in North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and Timmins raises important questions about how accessible, timely and locally informed services will be maintained for injured and ill workers, employers, health-care providers and municipal organizations across Northeastern Ontario.

Northern Ontario's geography must be central to any service-delivery strategy. Even before these closures, residents and employers travelled considerable distances to reach a regional WSIB office. Hearst was served through Timmins, approximately 260 kilometres away, while Wawa was served through Sault Ste. Marie, approximately 226 kilometres away. These are significant one-way distances that become even more challenging during winter conditions.

The distance between Northern communities means closing regional offices cannot be addressed simply by directing people to another physical location. In many cases, the next available office may be several additional hours away. Digital and telephone services are helpful, but they will not meet every need. Many Northern residents and employers continue to experience unreliable broadband and cellular service. Some injured workers may also face accessibility challenges, limited digital literacy or complex claims that require direct assistance. Connectivity is an even greater concern at remote forestry and mining operations.

These workplaces can be located far from established communities and may not have the stable internet or cellular service required for reliable virtual meetings. A service model that depends too heavily on remote communication may not reflect the practical realities of Northern Ontario's economy.

Local and regional WSIB employees understand these realities. They are familiar with industries such as mining, forestry, construction, transportation, health care and municipal services. They also understand Northern health-care networks, long travel distances, winter conditions and the challenges involved in developing safe and practical return-to-work plans in smaller and remote communities.

This is particularly concerning given FONOM's longstanding concerns about safety on Northern Ontario's highways. Requiring injured workers or employers to travel greater distances for in-person assistance may expose them to additional risk, particularly during winter conditions or highway closures.

We understand that WSIB intends to continue providing some in-person return-to-work support and has described the changes as part of a transition from a storefront model to online and telephone service delivery. However, FONOM has not seen sufficient information explaining how this model will maintain or improve service levels throughout Northeastern Ontario.

Before proceeding further, we believe municipalities, workers, employers and other Northern stakeholders deserve a clear explanation of the WSIB's regional service strategy.

FONOM is requesting a meeting between the FONOM Executive and either you or WSIB Chair Grant Walsh at the earliest possible opportunity. President and CEO Jeffery Lang and appropriate WSIB officials would also be welcome to participate.

During the meeting, we would like to better understand:

- How claims and account-management services will be delivered across Northeastern Ontario;
- Where WSIB's remaining in-person employees will be located and what geographic areas they will serve;
- How in-person service will be provided when workers, workplaces and communities are located several hours from a regional centre;
- How injured workers and employers without reliable internet or cellular

access will be supported;

- How WSIB will provide effective service to remote forestry and mining operations where virtual meetings may not be reliable;
- How local knowledge of Northern industries, health-care services, transportation challenges and winter conditions will be maintained;
- What service standards and performance measures will be used to ensure Northern workers and employers do not experience longer delays or reduced access;
- What consultations were undertaken with affected communities and Northern stakeholders before the decision was made; and
- Whether the WSIB is prepared to reconsider its approach and maintain an appropriate regional presence in Northeastern Ontario.

FONOM supports the responsible modernization of public services. However, modernization must account for Northern Ontario's geography, limited connectivity and industry realities. It must not create additional barriers for injured workers or employers seeking timely and knowledgeable assistance.

We respectfully ask that no further irreversible action be taken until the Province and the WSIB have met with Northern municipal representatives and clearly explained how accessible, timely and locally informed services will be maintained.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to receiving a timely response and arranging the requested meeting.

Yours,



Dave Plourde, President of FONOM

cc: Grant B. Walsh, Chair, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Jeffery A. Lang, President and CEO, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Minister Vic Fedeli

Minister George Pirie