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May 11, 2021

Dear Premier Ford,

We write regarding the expansion of police powers following your announcement of April 16, 2021 and to voice our opposition to the woefully inadequate Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit announced on April 28, 2021. Despite the decision by the Government of Ontario to retract particular amendments made on April 16, 2021 to *O.Reg 8/21 Enforcement of COVID-19 Measures* amid public backlash, Queer Ontario remains deeply concerned that the power to harass, surveil, card, and arrest people in attempts to enforce the latest stay-at-home order will have a disproportionately negative impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities across the province. Similarly, and seemingly in response to the concerns voiced by thousands of health care professionals, community organizations, and the scientific advice of Ontario's own COVID-19 Advisory Table, your Government's recent announcement of only three days of employer-paid sick leave is effectively a slap in the face for working class Ontarians.

Amidst a global public health crisis, your Government has repeatedly failed to establish an efficient vaccine registration system, help seniors and other vulnerable residents in long-term care, protect workers, and so much more. Instead of developing a pandemic response that prioritizes the health and well-being of vulnerable and marginalized communities and the safety of working people, your Government appears content to police your way into deepening the effects of this crisis, while blaming both individual Ontarians and other orders of government for your own short-sighted mismanagement.

We therefore demand that you:

- 1. Rescind all newly established policing powers effective across Ontario**
- 2. Legislate ten days of permanent, employer-paid sick leave**
- 3. Focus closures and vaccine-access measures around evidence of COVID-19 transmission**

Rescind all newly established policing powers effective across Ontario. With inexcusable regularity, many queer and trans people – particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, neurodiverse, low-income, unhoused, and precariously housed – face disproportionate discrimination and violence at the hands of police. While the regulations authorizing police to stop people *at random* [were repealed](#) following a statement from Solicitor General Sylvia Jones on April 17, 2021, subsequent regulations

made under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* continue to allow police to stop and question any and all persons believed to be in violation of current emergency measures. These regulations, coupled with the ever-shifting dictate that people remain physically separated from those outside of their own household raises concern about the increase of discriminatory policing on the basis of age, family status, religion, sexuality, as well as gender identity and expression, in addition to race and class. Indeed, as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association [reported](#) in June 2020, following extensive research into the expansion of police powers in response to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Individuals in same-sex relationships reported that they felt targeted by law enforcement, as they were stopped, questioned about their relationship, and required to provide identification, while heterosexual couples in the same spaces were allowed to walk by without suspicion. Young people, who often live with roommates, also reported increased targeting from law enforcement (v).

As author [Desmond Cole](#) points out, the term *random* was not even included in the order announced in April. In fact, we know that the practice of [carding](#) and the prevalence of so-called *street checks* by police across Ontario are rarely, if ever, articulated as being *random*. Despite this, we also know that such practices most often result in the arbitrary collection and storage of personal information, questioning, and detainment of Black, Indigenous, racialized, neurodiverse, low-income, unhoused, and precariously housed people – the very same groups who, along with migrants and working-class Ontarians, face [disproportionately high rates of COVID-19](#) infection, hospitalization, and mortality.

Legislate ten days of permanent, employer-paid sick leave. After eliminating access to a modest two days of employer-paid sick leave in 2018, your Government voted against paid sick leave more than twenty times in 2021 alone. Yet, on April 22, 2021 – despite months of rhetoric suggesting that a provincial sick leave program would be [fiscally irresponsible](#) when delivered alongside the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) – you announced that the Government of Ontario would soon unveil details of a provincial program touted as [“the best program anywhere in North America, bar none.”](#)

The boldness of this claim notwithstanding, the Ontario COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit (WIPB) announced on April 28, 2021 actually leaves many workers [worse off than before](#). While the benefit guarantees regular wages for non-gig economy workers for up to three consecutive days, many remain unaware that they cannot claim both WIPB and CRSB in the same week. This means that those who cannot work for the other days of a week in which they apply to collect WIPB will remain both unpaid and unable to collect CRSB for the days that remain. Differently put, a minimum-wage worker who stays home for testing, receives a positive result, and is required to remain in isolation will lose several hundred dollars in gross weekly income simply by collecting WIPB. As Ontario’s COVID-19 Advisory Table [have made abundantly clear](#), working Ontarians need at least ten days of easily accessible paid sick leave that will support them in following public health guidelines. Absent appropriate support, avoiding the decision to work while sick, in fear of economic hardship and employer pressure, is next to impossible for many.

Focus closures and vaccine-access measures around evidence of COVID-19 transmission. The time to listen to doctors and scientists is now. With experts warning of a fourth wave and with increased risk of COVID-19 transmission linked to congregate settings such as shelters and [industrial workplaces](#), the Government of Ontario must support appropriate workplace safety precautions while ensuring timely

access to vaccines for marginalized communities, front-line workers, and those deemed essential. In addition to legislating ten days of employer-paid sick leave, we urge the government to work collaboratively with employers and community groups to ensure barrier-free access to vaccination. [Extending vaccine access](#) to those 18+ at select pharmacies in hot spots is simply not enough to address the public health inequities exacerbated by your Government's haphazard vaccine rollout thus far. The fact remains that the lowest rates of vaccination are in communities hardest hit by COVID-19, where high rates of poverty and existing barriers to the healthcare access mean Black, Indigenous, racialized, neurodiverse, low-income, unhoused, and precariously housed people – along with migrants and working-class Ontarians – are bearing the brunt of this crisis. Combined with expanded police powers and absent appropriate employer-paid sick leave for workers across Ontario, the lack of a clear vaccination plan means increased and enduring harm to vulnerable and marginalized communities.

Focusing on individual behaviour, restricting mobility and the accessibility of public space with threats of heavy-handed enforcement, and refusing the advice of doctors, scientists, and other public health experts is nothing but a short-sighted distraction in place of a real plan. Unlike enhanced policing powers, adequate paid sick days, appropriate support for people in high-risk congregate settings, and a targeted vaccine strategy are precisely what is needed to keep Ontarians safe and healthy. Ahead of an impending fourth wave, we call on the Government of Ontario to heed our demands and implement measures that actually respond to the needs of working people as well as vulnerable and marginalized communities across the province.

Sincerely,

Leonard Halladay

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Member, Queer Ontario

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