

Nunatsiaq News
157 Nipisa St. Box 8. Iqaluit, NU X0A 0H0

16 June 2023

Subject: Support for Iqaluit Housing Employees on Strike

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my strong support for the employees of the Iqaluit Housing Authority (IHA) who have been on strike for 89 days now. The issues raised by the Nunavut Employees Union (NEU) on behalf of the IHA workers are of the utmost importance, and it is crucial that their concerns are heard and addressed.

It is disheartening to see that the NHC (Nunavut Housing Corporation) and the responsible Minister, Lorne Kusugak, have failed to take any responsibility for the current situation. While the NHC sets budgets, the IHA has consistently highlighted that the wage demands put forth by the NEU are beyond its financial capacity. This lack of acknowledgment and refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue only exacerbates the conflict and prolongs the strike.

The IHA's refusal to offer fair wages and its insulting economic offers, which are well below the current inflation rates, are deeply concerning. The workers, a majority of whom are Inuit and their families, deserve to be compensated properly and provided with better working conditions. It is essential that the IHA recognizes the value of its employees' hard work and dedication and takes immediate steps to address their valid wage concerns.

Furthermore, the IHA's proposal to remove access to various articles in the collective agreement for casual and term employees is unacceptable. IHA wants to remove access to vital articles such as Maternity Allowance, Severance and leave without Pay for Personal needs to name a few. The IHA has proposed removing any limitation on the use of term or casual employees, as well as eliminating any commitment to make term or casual employees permanent after a period of time in their position. This move threatens job security and certainty for members, particularly Inuit staff. Instead of prioritizing the creation of full-time, meaningful employment opportunities, especially for Inuit staff, the IHA seems to be disregarding their welfare and encouraging precarious casual work.

Another alarming aspect is the IHA's discriminatory treatment of Inuktitut-speaking employees. By refusing to provide a language bonus to these employees, the IHA fails to acknowledge the clear advantage they bring to their work. Inuktitut-speaking employees who enter IHA homes play a vital role in ensuring effective communication and cultural sensitivity. It is only fair that they receive appropriate compensation for their valuable skills.

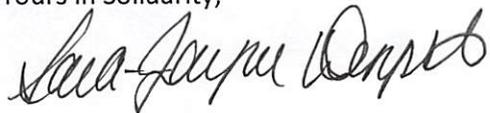
Moreover, the IHA's reliance on scabs, replacement workers, and management during the strike instead of engaging in fair negotiations further exacerbates the situation. This approach shows a lack of commitment to resolving the conflict and reaching a fair deal. The introduction of Federal anti-scab legislation would help prevent such situations and encourage genuine negotiations.

It is also worth noting that the IHA's inability to retain quality employees and provide a proper workplace creates additional challenges for Iqaluit's most vulnerable residents. The IHA consistently faces understaffing issues, leading to stress and disorganization among the dedicated and caring staff who remain. The revolving door at the managerial level has contributed to the current state of chaos within the organization, which ultimately impacts the safety and well-being of the community.

Furthermore, the recent announcement by the NHC and NCC Development Limited (NCCD) regarding the construction of new public housing units raises concerns about the future of housing services in Nunavut. Without proper retention and recruitment strategies in place, it is uncertain who will be available to service and maintain these units. The stance taken by IHA workers has broader implications for housing services across Nunavut, underscoring the importance of addressing their concerns promptly.

I strongly urge the NHC, the responsible Minister and the IHA to take immediate action to resolve the ongoing strike and address the legitimate concerns of the NEU members. Fair wages, job security, recognition of language skills, and better working conditions are essential to ensure a sustainable and effective housing authority.

Yours in Solidarity,



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