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March 19, 2020

To: All Affiliates

Dear Affiliates,

The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario is continuing to monitor the evolving COVID-19 pandemic as the federal and provincial governments are making new announcements and implementing legislative changes with a view to containing the spread of the virus, and helping to ease the economic hardships that working Ontarians are having to endure as a result of the contagion.

During a Press Conference yesterday, Premier Doug Ford made some comments in response to a reporter's question about how the COVID-19 situation is being managed on construction sites throughout Ontario. In his answer, he said the following:

Well, I'll follow the advice of Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Minister of Health, and the COVID-19 Command Table. In saying that, we addressed this issue with the Minister of Labour – he was on a conference call with all labour, heads of labour unions in the construction trade, they emphasized, everyone of them, they want to keep the jobsites open. In saying that, they said any worker that isn't feeling well, that's under the weather, they've asked go home, isolate for 14 days. But again, we're going to go jobsite by jobsite as per their request, not ours, so if they feel that jobsites shouldn't be open, they all guaranteed us, they will close that jobsite, and we'll just play it day by day. But again, we consulted with every labour organization in this province. Thank you.

In hearing that answer, some have asked if union leaders are in a position to close down construction jobsites in Ontario which is not the case; rather, construction employers, owner-clients, and sometimes governments are the ones who decide whether to keep construction jobsites open, notwithstanding individual construction workers' right to refuse unsafe work.

We, at the Provincial Building Trades Council, recognize that in these remarks by the Premier, there was no ill-will towards the leadership of unionized construction labour and/or the workforce, and that the broader point made by Premier Ford was to address scenarios that would allow workers to self-isolate from the workplace if showing symptoms, and to generally exercise caution. Additionally, we at the Building Trades recognize the efforts by the Premier and his Cabinet to work with labour organizations through this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new daily reality that construction workers, employers and governments are all adjusting to, and we must all work together to prevent further transmission of this virus. Our Council is working constructively with the government and with our employers, so that we can all overcome these challenging times together.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick J. Dillon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line at the end.

Patrick J. Dillon, Business Manager & Secretary Treasurer
Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario