# ETFO Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

## Bill 27, Working for Workers Act, 2021

November 2021

Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario
Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l’élémentaire de l’Ontario

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The union represents 83,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province. Its Building Better Schools education agenda can be viewed at BuildingBetterSchools.ca.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) represents 83,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province and is the largest teacher federation in Canada.

ETFO is an important stakeholder in the public education system and appreciates the opportunity to make a written submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy as it considers Bill 27, *Working for Workers Act, 2021.*

ETFO expresses its support for the positions advanced by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) both in response to Bill 27 and during the consultations held by the government on the Insurance Fund Surplus Distribution Model for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). ETFO urges the Committee to recommend amending Bill 27 to remove Schedule 6, which contains amendments to the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*.

## Schedule 6 – Amendments to the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*

The amendments to the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* contained in Schedule 6, provide for the WSIB to distribute some of its funding surplus to employers. If Bill 27 is passed with Schedule 6 in its present form, there will be enormous political pressure on the WSIB to distribute part of its surplus. Such pressure will distract and divert the WSIB’s focus and resources away from the important purposes of Ontario’s workplace safety and insurance system. Those purposes are set out in section 1 of the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* as follows:

1. *To promote health and safety in workplaces.*
2. *To facilitate the return to work and recovery of workers who sustain personal injury arising out of and in the course of employment or who suffer from an occupational disease.*
3. *To facilitate the re-entry into the labour market of workers and spouses of deceased workers.*
4. *To provide compensation and other benefits to workers and to the survivors of deceased workers.*

These purposes should not be subordinated to the short-term political gain associated with a payment to employers. Too many workplaces in Ontario remain unsafe and too many people with work-related injuries and illnesses have not received the support that they need.

There are significant health and safety concerns in the education sector, particularly regarding workplace violence and mental stress. Researchers at the University of Ottawa recently released a study that looked at the incidence of workplace violence against educators.[[1]](#footnote-1) The study found that 89 per cent of participants reported at least one act, attempt or threat of physical violence at work during the 2018-2019 school year, with 70 per cent of classroom-based workers and school support staff experience one or more acts of physical force at work during the same period.

Mental stress among educators continues to rise, especially given the challenges of working in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent mental health survey of more than 5,000 ETFO members conducted by the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers and the Institute for Work & Health found unprecedented levels of burnout among respondents, with 79 per cent of women and 71 per cent of men having burnout scores above 75 (on a scale of 0 to 100). For comparison, the 2019 Canadian worker average burnout score was 52.[[2]](#footnote-2)

While the WSIB has a funding surplus, many people with work-related injuries and illnesses continue to struggle. They often face direct and systemic discrimination in their efforts to recover, return to work, and find new jobs. Many Ontarians, particularly those suffering from mental stress and occupational disease, have had legitimate claims denied by the WSIB because of its restrictive policies and austerity-based adjudication.

Instead of allowing the WSIB to gift money to employers, the Act should require any funding surplus to be directed to making workplaces safer and to improving the lives of those who have suffered the effects of work-related injury and disease. Funding should not be taken out of the workplace safety and insurance system when there is so much important work left to be done.

If passed in its current form, Schedule 6 of Bill 27 would deepen the injustice inflicted by Ontario’s workplace safety and insurance system on those who have suffered workplace injuries and illnesses in recent decades. As described in the submissions of the Ontario Federation of Labour, the WSIB’s funding surplus is the result of benefit cuts, aggressive claims management, and the systemic under-recognition of injuries. Thousands of injured and ill people, along with their families, suffered so that the WSIB could achieve its funding surplus; if the proposed amendments are passed a significant part of that surplus may be used to give employers a handout. That should not happen.

### ETFO urges the Committee to recommend amending Bill 27 by withdrawing Schedule 6.

## Recommendation:

1. That Schedule 6 of Bill 27 be withdrawn.

JS: FC: MG

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1. Bruckert C., Santor, D., & Mario, B. (2021*). In harm's way: The epidemic of violence against education support workers in Ontario*. Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (2021). *Mental Health: It’s Worth Protecting*. Available at](http://etfohealthandsafety.ca/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Pandemic-Experience-Survey.pdf): [↑](#footnote-ref-2)