

The following message was sent on behalf of Michael Richards, Deputy Secretary of Cabinet, and Charlene Paquin, Civil Service Commissioner to Civil Service employees on April 22, 2020.

Last week, government initiated a process to address the unprecedented financial impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic on Manitoba. We recognize that this is a challenging time, and you are likely concerned about what this means for you.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented complex challenges across the globe. It has transformed our lives and, as a province, we are united in fighting this virus together, slowing the rate of infection, and supporting our front line and other essential service workers. Unfortunately, these public health and safety measures have profound consequences for our provincial government.

In the face of severely constricted economies and collapsing provincial revenues, we are delivering on expanded support for our health care and other essential services. This means that our financial capacity to adapt and respond to pressures has been significantly compromised.

[This public health emergency has forced government to face difficult considerations, conversations, and decisions.](#) The depth and extent of our economic and fiscal challenges [were communicated publicly on April 14, 2020.](#) [On the same day, we initiated meetings](#) with public sector employers and unions, to be open and transparent about our collective challenges. This included core government and government unions, and also employers and unions representing crown corporations, universities and colleges, and other government organizations, collectively known as “Other Reporting Entities” (OREs).

During these meetings, we urged all employers and their unions to begin immediate and constructive discussions about addressing the reality of our situation. We asked them to consider options for expenditure reductions in operations and wages. In the days since April 14, there have been many follow-up meetings, including meetings with all of the unions that represent core government.

As a first step before considering workforce options, we halted all non-essential spending. With respect to workforce cost reductions, we are committed in our approach to:

- Minimize layoffs and their impacts
- Explore additional Voluntary Reduced Workweek (VRW) days
- Gain access to the Federal Employment Insurance Work Sharing Program, by:
 - continuing our advocacy with the federal government to expand eligibility to core government and more public sector employers, to ensure that this protection – funded

by Manitoba public sector employers and Manitoba public sector employees – is available when they need it most;

- inviting public sector unions to join with us in these advocacy efforts;
- maintaining ongoing employment, albeit on a potentially reduced basis;
- better maintaining member-employee connections to their unions;
- mitigating partial layoff impacts to increase overall, blended income levels for any affected employees.

Other workforce options include further management reductions and voluntary executive salary reductions. Potential legislation has also been identified as a last resort.

So what is happening right now?

The next step is a review, this week, of the proposals and assessments arising from initiation of this process. These proposals and assessments have been completed by all OREs, as well as for all departments under the leadership of Deputy Ministers.

What can you expect?

It is possible that layoff notices may be issued while these discussions continue and options continue to be explored. Our goal is to minimize actual layoffs, but our collective agreements require notice periods.

Regardless of what lies ahead, we promise to provide you with timely, direct and frank information. We understand your need for immediate answers and the concern it causes to not have them. And we do appreciate – as do all of our leadership colleagues – the natural uncertainty and anxiety caused by these extraordinary circumstances. However, the process is complex and requires due diligence underlined by care and sensitivity. We want to assure you that, even in moments where we are not communicating, we are working toward solutions.

On behalf of all of the Manitobans we serve, thank you again for your professionalism and your dedication to all of our collective efforts. We will meet these challenges together. The public service will emerge from the unprecedented experience of COVID-19 stronger, more resilient, and more focused.