

MGEU

# Pre-Budget Submission 2024

Manitoba Government and  
General Employees' Union

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## INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to submit recommendations for the 2024 Provincial budget on behalf of the 32,000 members of the Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU).

MGEU members live in communities across Manitoba and work in government services, at Crown corporations, in healthcare, education, child welfare, and social service agencies. Our members take great pride in their work providing services to fellow Manitobans and building a Province we are all proud to call home.

Whether on the frontlines or behind the scenes – during natural disasters, major life events, or routine everyday life – MGEU members are there. Every day, Manitoba families rely on quality healthcare, educational opportunities, safe housing and supports, well-maintained and clear roads and bridges, and an affordable standard of living.

After years of cuts and privatization, these vital public services are suffering—and Manitobans are paying the price. Manitobans elected your government to fix public services. To do that, your government must address the staffing crisis in the Civil Services.

Our members were encouraged to hear a commitment to teamwork, listening to workers, and expect their issues to be addressed with urgency.

Our budget submission will emphasize key areas where prompt action is required to restore services to levels that meet the needs and expectations of Manitobans. Our priorities stem from the invaluable insights of front-line workers serving Manitobans daily. We eagerly anticipate seeing action on these priorities in the 2024 budget.

Whether as snow plow drivers, conservation officers, mechanics or civil servants in this building, these hardworking professionals are the people who will turn our shared vision into a reality for all of us. To the public service—we thank you for getting us through difficult times. It is time for a government that works with public servants instead of against them to deliver results for you, the people of Manitoba.

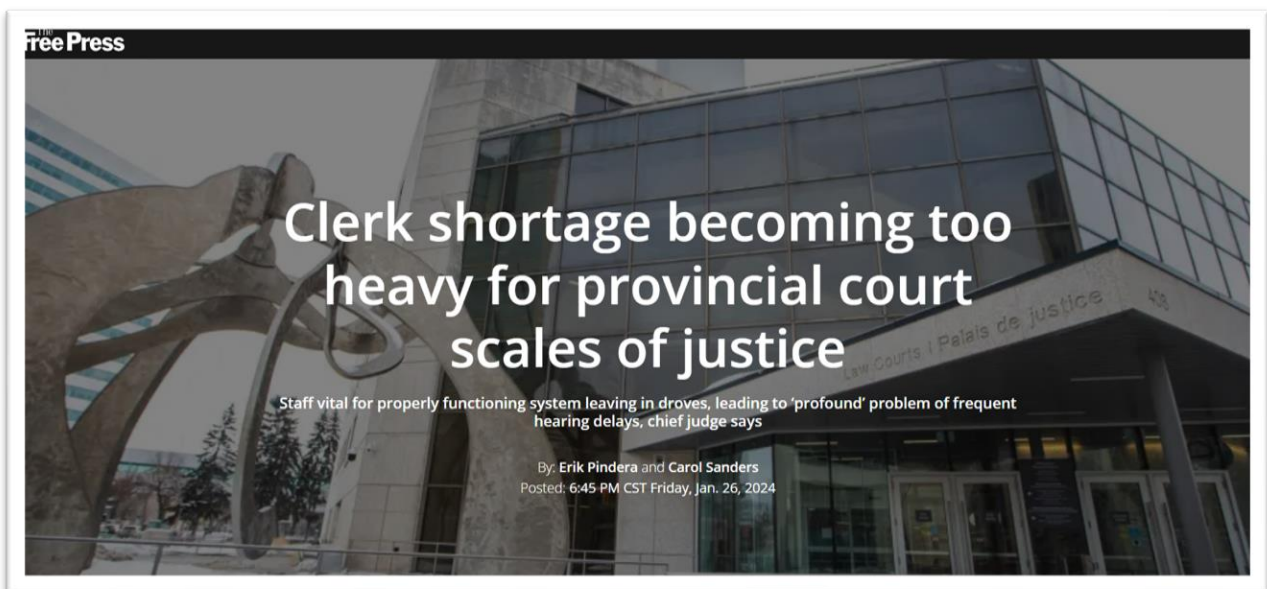
– Throne Speech, 2023

## CIVIL SERVICE – TURNING THE TIDE

We were encouraged when Premier Kinew's first Speech from the Throne stated,

*"We are working to implement the mandate we received from you by working together with the public servants who share our commitment to make life better for all Manitobans. We will value their work and listen to their expert advice. Whether as snow plow drivers, conservation officers, mechanics or civil servants in this building, these hardworking professionals are the people who will turn our shared vision into a reality for all of us. To the public service—we thank you for getting us through difficult times. It is time for a government that works with public servants instead of against them to deliver results for you, the people of Manitoba."*

It is difficult to overstate the urgency required to repair these damaged public services and reprioritize investments to support vital public services provided by dedicated Civil Service members.



Aggressive vacancy management, insufficient resourcing across departments, and inadequate efforts to recruit and retain staff have all contributed to under-staffing. A recent Winnipeg Free Press article outlines the dire under-staffing of Court Clerks in the Department of Justice,

*If nothing is done to address the situation — which has been compounded with experienced provincial court clerks leaving for less-stressful and better-paying jobs elsewhere and the length of time required to hire and train new employees — the courts will stop working, people involved in the justice system warn. – Free Press*

A Clerk of the Court put a fine point on the severity of the situation stating, "We're losing half our staff in about a year, which means you don't have trained staff, you don't have senior staff who are able to pick up stuff when it gets worse," the clerk said. Provincial court Chief Judge Ryan Rolston stated that, "The full complement of provincial court clerks is normally 49, but there are currently 14 vacancies."

MGEU's [State of the Civil Service](#) report highlighted the crisis facing the Department of Health where vacancy rates reached 40% in 2023. The impact of these staffing shortages on the lives of Manitobans were once again revealed in a [CBC investigation](#) into the backlogs Manitobans are facing in getting their health card where 9,180 people are waiting for their health card applications to be processed. Without a health card, Manitobans don't qualify for health services, leaving them vulnerable and paying out of pocket until they can be reimbursed. The Premier has committed to addressing the backlog stating, "That is the plan. We're going to staff up the department of health to ensure health cards get delivered more quickly."

"That is the plan. We're going to staff up the department of health to ensure health cards get delivered more quickly."  
– Premier Kinew

[Global News](#) recently reported that the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure is facing a vacancy rate of 26% following years of cuts and privatization. The Department is now hiring back retirees who have left the public service in recent years to address this dangerous shortage of workers who keep our roads safe and clear during the winter season.

[Research by Professors Julie Guard and Jesse Hajer](#) has shown that from 2016 to 2021, programs in the Department of Labour saw their budgets fall by 26.4 percent and the workforce cut by 15.2 percent. Members reported that they are "... are extremely short-staffed," "having to do 1.25 to 1.5 jobs for most of the year, but getting paid for one," and "experiencing a high degree of burnout."

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These are just a few examples that have come to light recently, highlighting the ongoing crisis in the Civil Service resulting from across-the-board staffing cuts. Our members continue to report that there are widespread staffing issues across the Civil Service, which is

compounded by the Public Service Commission's data showing, "33.1% of public servants will be eligible to retire within five years, increasing to 53.7% within 10 years."

We recommend that the Minister in charge of the Public Service make every effort to stem the number of employees exiting their employment for other opportunities and undertake a large-scale recruitment effort to fix the Civil Service staffing crisis.

## PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTHCARE

Over 8,600 members of the MGEU play an essential role in the province's healthcare network. They are healthcare aides, custodial and maintenance workers, staffing clerks, dietitians, respiratory therapists, and speech language pathologists. These often-overlooked members are the backbone of our healthcare system, ensuring Manitobans receive necessary and deserving care. They provide care in personal care homes, hospitals, and communities.

As our population ages, it's crucial that services meet the increasing demand for care. Unfortunately, we are currently facing a staffing crisis caused by stagnant wages, deteriorating working conditions, and minimal recruitment and retention efforts. The result is a growing reliance on costly private for-profit agency workers to fill staffing gaps. This approach compromises the quality and continuity of care as short-term replacement workers lack the site-specific and client-specific knowledge of permanent employees.

We strongly urge the government to expedite the development of a comprehensive public healthcare recruitment and retention strategy for all members of the healthcare team, not solely focused on nurses and doctors. This strategy must address wage disparities, improve working conditions, and make healthcare a more appealing career path for both current and prospective healthcare professionals.

## QUALITY EDUCATION – SUPPORTING STUDENTS

A growing number of MGEU members provide frontline student support in our public schools. Educational assistants support students to succeed, clerks keep schools running, and custodial and maintenance staff ensure schools are clean and well-maintained. These members are often taken for granted and deserve to be recognized for their important contributions to quality education.

Post-secondary institutions provide learning opportunities and skills training – supporting good jobs and a growing economy. Training programs for nurses, healthcare aides, and allied health care workers are providing important staffing resources to Manitoba's

overburdened healthcare system. After years of cuts to funding for colleges and universities, it is time to reinvest in the future.

## SOCIAL SERVICES – CARING FOR MANITOBANS

MGEU's Community Based Social Services Component includes over 2,000 members providing direct support to Manitobans with disabilities, mental health clinicians, social workers, and child and youth care workers. They work at agencies like Knowles Centre, The Link, St. Amant Centre, Neecheewam Inc, Family Dynamics, and Manitoba Possible.

Many years of underfunding has resulted high turnover and resource shortages in this important sector. The rising cost of living and lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have taken a toll on Manitobans- leaving many unhoused, overburdened, and in crisis. There has never been a more important time for increased provincial funding that boosts wages to attract and retain these vital workers and keep Manitobans from falling through the cracks in our social support network.

We recommend a commitment of permanent, stable, and predictable provincial funding to stabilize the workforce and address recruitment and retention efforts in the non-profit community-based sector.

## RESTORING TRUST IN CROWN CORPORATIONS

MGEU represents members at Crown Corporations and Agencies like Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) and Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries (MBLL). After years of mismanagement and provincial government meddling in Manitoba's family of Crown Agencies, it is time for prudent and responsible management that ensures our shared assets remain on solid footing for the future. This summer's strikes at MPI and MBLL were a culmination of MGEU members feeling disrespected and devalued and highlight the need for management to rebuild trust with members.

Following several attempts to privatize Manitoba's liquor retailing model, it is time to reprioritize the "public" aspects of MBLL. Investing in good jobs, customer service, and innovating will ensure Manitobans receive the benefits of top-notch products and services and the return of 320 million dollars into public services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

MPI has been through a tumultuous period outlined in a recent organizational review that confirmed reports from members in the corporation. Members shared concerns about the "top heavy" and growing management layers at MPI, which were found in the report,

stating that there are 20 managers "with no direct reports" or staff, and another 84 with fewer than four staff under their supervision.

The botched overhaul of MPI's insurance and claims platform – Project Nova – has been in the spotlight and continues to be mired in ballooning budgets and untendered contracts. The project has been largely led and delivered by costly private sector consultants and will continue to burden the organization for years to come.

Manitobans own these shared assets and expect them to be managed in their best interest.

We recommend the provincial government reestablish the priorities at Manitoba's Crown Agencies to reflect the public interest by listening to front-line staff instead of consultants.

We recommend you direct MBLL to strengthen our public liquor retailing model by expanding Liquor Mart Express Stores, improving liquor home delivery, and improving customer service by investing in more full-time positions.

## INVESTING IN PUBLIC SERVICES

The bottom line is a tax cut is a service cut.

The previous Government prioritized tax cuts that benefit the wealthy over investments for all Manitobans. We strongly recommend a different approach that is fiscally responsible and supports vital public services. A recent Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba (CCPA-MB) report, [Funding Our Way: Rebalancing Revenues and Spending for a Fair and Prosperous Manitoba](#), recounts this failed public policy approach,

*The scale of this giveaway is massive: since 2016, the PC government has announced tax cuts that add up to over \$1.4 Billion in annual giveaways. When adjusted for the growth of the economy, this adds up to nearly \$1.6 Billion in annual revenues lost to date that could be otherwise supporting public services or other affordability measures for Manitobans on a more targeted basis.*

The report goes on to explain that rising transfers from the Federal Government coupled with deferred revenues in the form of tax cuts, are putting Manitoba's fiscal position at greater risk in the future as our own source revenue streams decline. Cancelling scheduled tax cuts and taking a moderate and responsible path to balancing the budget will help put Manitoba's services on a solid footing for the future. Your government has also committed to balancing the budget in your first term, which will do further harm to the public services.

We recommend extending the timeline for a return to a balanced budget from four years to eight years.



We recommend putting a stop to unaffordable tax cuts that benefit the wealthy and invest in public services, or at the very least, delay the implementation of any tax cuts until public services are restored and the provincial budget is balanced.

## CONCLUSION

Strong public services build strong communities and improve quality of life. After years of service cuts and privatization, Manitobans are ready for a different approach that prioritizes the people that provide public services. We recommend a multi-year commitment to recruitment and retention of workers in the public service. These efforts must be supported by a fiscally responsible path forward that ensures that government revenues and expenditures meet the expectations of Manitobans who entrusted you with the responsibility to chart a new course for our Province.

Thank you for the opportunity to present MGEU's proposals for the 2024 budget.