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Union President calls for action to deal with workplace harassment/bullying

The president of the province's largest labour union is calling on the government to deal with the increasing problem of workplace harassment.

Shelley Ward, president of the PEI Union of Public Sector Employees says that the government and the Union have a joint Policy in place on how to deal with the problem, the task at hand now is to identify the issues that exist in the workplace that are fostering this negative environment. "An increasing number of our members are expressing concerns over the rising incidence of harassment/bullying in the workplace. They describe incidents between co-workers, employees and supervisors, employees and clients and even violent situations between clients where employees have been caught in the middle. Many of these members do not want to file an official grievance because they fear possible repercussions," states Ward.

The Union feels that there are a number of contributing factors, many of which could be alleviated if the government took some proactive measures. "In our opinion the best place to start is with a training program for supervisors. Many employees that are hired for supervisory positions were previously working alongside of the employees that they now supervise. This ability to be able to advance in the workplace is one that UPSE fully supports. We agree that the skills and abilities that are acquired during an employee's career should be recognized by the employer. The problem is that supervisors also require the ability to assess and diffuse conflicts. These skills require specific training. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively is also a skill that is required of someone in a supervisory role. The employers need to provide all supervisors with this training," explains Ward.

Many UPSE members are feeling the stress of increased workloads. Having to do more with less has become a reality for far too many workers. Working day in and day out under this kind of pressure can also affect one's physical and mental health.

"The amount of verbal abuse and bullying in our workplaces is increasing. This kind of behavior is known to escalate over time and very often the abuser will become physical. The government needs to do more to ensure all workers in this province have a safe environment to work in - one where they can be productive and efficient. In workplaces where bullying and verbal abuse are known to be an issue, productivity levels and program efficiency may often be reduced."

"All employers, both in the public and private sectors, need to take this issue seriously. They need to insure that members who report harassment/bulling incidents will not be subject to repercussions. They have to provide for the safety of their employees by ensuring that supervisory staff have the skills to identify and deal with workplace conflict. Left unaddressed these situations can escalate to violence and in extreme cases death."

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