

January 25, 2010

The Honourable Dwight Duncan
MPP – Windsor-Tecumseh
Unit 211
2825 Lauzon Parkway
Windsor, Ontario N8T 3H5

Dear Minister Duncan:

Thank you for meeting recently with myself and other Ontario labour leaders on January 21, 2010.

During that meeting you raised a number of points that are germane to recent developments in your home region of Windsor.

You agreed that cutting public sector services and jobs while the province is taking measures to stimulate the economy is counterproductive. We couldn't agree more.

I am sure you are aware of the importance of such public sector jobs to communities like Windsor, which have been economically hard-hit.

On the very day we were meeting, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union was notified that the Windsor public health lab would be closing, sending the work and 21 good-paying jobs to London, Hamilton and Toronto.

Further, the local prospects for the medical lab technologists are limited, given the local hospitals are presently planning their own layoffs in response to an impending funding freeze. Once these MLTs leave the region, they will be difficult to recruit back. Ontario, like most other jurisdictions, is bracing for acute shortages of MLTs over the next five years.

The Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion runs these lab services to support health providers, the public health system and partner ministries in making informed decisions and taking informed action to improve the health and security of Ontarians.

While the OAHPP claims that this consolidation of lab service will make the agency more efficient, I would respectfully remind you we have heard this story before.

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Hospital amalgamation and consolidation of community lab work are just two recent examples of such claims going terribly wrong. Today one in three hospitals is in deficit and private labs doing community work are costing Ontario taxpayers about 50 per cent more than had they been performed using existing assets in community hospitals.

In fact, the government commissioned March 31, 2008 RPO Consultants report provides ample evidence to suggest local hospitals should reclaim this work.

A similar consolidation of public hospital labs in the Ottawa region did not produce any efficiency despite years of planning and great public expenditure.

Further, Windsor's Medical Officer of Health says he's concerned about the impact the closure will have on the turnover of lab tests for illnesses such as tuberculosis and influenza, as well as bacteria and viruses responsible for other respiratory and gastrointestinal outbreaks.

We would ask you to speak to the Minister of Health about placing this closure on hold until all evidence can be evaluated.

We would also ask your government to place a moratorium on any public sector job cuts at this time, particularly in hard-hit communities like Windsor.

Yours truly,

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

WT:rj

c: The Honourable Deborah Matthews, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
France Gelinas, NDP Health Critic
Christine Elliott, PC Health Critic