



**A FLEXIBLE ONLINE PLAN WITH SOLID OFFLINE RESULTS.**  
Manage your weight loss completely online and learn how you can lose weight and keep it off.

**SIGN UP**

**WeightWatchers.ca**  
Stop Dieting. Start Living.

**-10**



- Careers
- Classifieds
- Obituaries
- Wheels
- E-Edition
- Shopping

**SUBSCRIBE** MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2009

News Sports Special Sections Business Arts/Life Multimedia Blogs Links Contact Us

### Columns

[Home](#) [news](#) [Columns](#) **Government is asking too much over sick time**

**MAITLAND FORD-LINCOLN**  
**NOT JUST A NEW TRUCK ... A NEW F150**  
NEW STRENGTH & EFFICIENCY • GREATER TOWING  
HEAVIER PAYLOAD • SAFEST F150 YET • NEW INTERIOR TECH

**Smart On Fuel** Now up to **29MPG**

## Government is asking too much over sick time

Posted By **Doug Millroy**

Updated 37 mins ago

About 25 years ago, when I was editor of The Sault Star, it was deemed that a few people were abusing the company's generous sick time provisions. As a result, some changes to the provisions were proposed that would have affected all full-time employees.

They didn't go anywhere as even some of us in management believed that this was not the way to tackle the problem. You didn't punish every employee to curtail the activities of a few.

Although I can't remember all the details of the proposal, it seems akin to what the government is proposing to its corrections officers today, a situation I have been loathe to address as I have a family member involved on the union side.

I didn't agree with how The Star was going to tackle the sick-time issue back then and I don't agree with the heavy-handed manner in which the government is tackling it now.

I am not saying there aren't abuses. When I look at the figures the government has presented, I believe there has to be. I just find that what it is proposing, if the corrections officers don't get their sick time down on their own, to be over the top.

Article 44 in the collective agreement between the government and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union says employees who are sick or injured are entitled to leaves of absence with pay. They receive regular salary for the first six working days of absence and 75 per cent of regular salary for an additional 124 working days of absence in each calendar year.

This entitlement kicks in after an employee has completed 20 consecutive working days.

The government wants to remove corrections officers from the provincial service short-term sickness plan and, according to the union, is willing to allow this provision to continue only if in Year 1 of the agreement their yearly provincial sick time average falls to 13.33 days and in Year 2, to 10.66 days.

The union, which has voted overwhelmingly for strike action, naturally worries that even if the targets are met for the first two years, the new employer plan, which for some reason does not affect part-time employees who make up more than 40 per cent of the workforce, could be implemented any time the yearly sick-time average exceeds 10.66 days, which it says is below the current ministry-established provincial sick-time target of 11 days.

The government plan also would bring about other changes.

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, president of OPSEU, pointed out in a news release that sick time would be managed by an outside insurance carrier and would only accrue at a rate of five hours per month and only if an employee has full attendance that month.

[Continued After Advertisement Below](#)

- Past 7 days - FREE
  - UR Sault Ste Marie
- [Archive Information](#)

**Search**

**GORDON LIGHTFOOT**  
Live at **Essan Centre**  
**CLICK HERE**

**SLEEPY'S MATTRESS EXPRESS**  
Serta Simmonspring  
Specials throughout the store

**BAD CREDIT? NO CREDIT?**  
Click Here!

**SAULT STE. MARIE'S INDEPENDENT DRUG MARTS**  
THIS WEEK'S SPECIALS! **click here**

learn more **CLICK HERE!**

**LAKE SUPERIOR STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Crema Refinish**  
Click HERE! Quality • Service • Value

## Advertisement



Thomas said after four consecutive days of absence without pay, corrections officers would move to 66 2/3 per cent pay on the fifth day if the claim was approved by the insurance carrier. If they do not have any sick time in the bank, any absence that is less than five consecutive days is unpaid. If the insurance company denies the claim, the employee gets paid nothing.

How did it come to this?

Well, according to Greg Dennis, a spokesperson for the Ontario Ministry of Government Services, it is all about absenteeism and money. The sick time being piled up by corrections officers is costing the government a pile. And he uses provincial auditor-general Jim McCarter's figures to back up his claim.

"Adult Institutional Services continues to have a serious problem with absenteeism among correctional officers, including the abuse of sick leave and overtime provisions," McCarter said in his 2008 report covering 2007.

"Based on an eight-hour day, correctional officers took an average of 32.5 sick days per year, which cost AIS about \$20 million annually in replacement and overtime costs. With overtime, some correctional officers made over \$140,000 a year -- more than double their annual base salary."

Dennis told reporter Bill Bradley, of Northern Life in Sudbury, that based on eight-hour work days Ontario corrections officers have double the sick days of some other jurisdictions. He mentioned British Columbia, 17 days; Alberta 11; Nova Scotia, 11.5 and federal institutions, 16.

"We really do appreciate the difficult job corrections officers have and the hard work they do. This is about getting the costs in line," Dennis said.

Although union mobilizer Normand Pilon of Sudbury told me one "couldn't believe everything the auditor general reported as he was reporting based on doctored numbers provided by the employer," McCarter would have to be way out in his figures for anyone to argue that the sick time in corrections is not out of line.

However, I think the government itself is part of the problem. After all, there is a mechanism in place to call employees to account if their sick time exceeds ministry targets and it had to know as far back as 2001, when the absentee average among corrections workers had crept up to 20 days a year, that a problem was developing.

Pilon told me targets are set by each ministry. He said if one of his members in the Ministry of Community and Social Services goes over the target of 12 days of sick time per year, he/she has to meet with managers to explain what, if any, is the problem. He said the attendance-management program has three steps, with monitoring by managers intensifying in Step 2 and disciplinary action such as dismissal being possible in Step 3.

He said corrections has the same program but claimed the auditor general reported that managers failed to implement it or conduct attendance-review meetings, although I haven't been able to find that in my copy of the report.

In any event I believe the government is being unreasonable in demanding that corrections and youth workers get their sick-time average down to 10.66 days a year. This is making no allowance at all for the type of stressful work the corrections people do, being penned up with dangerous criminals, always at risk of picking up HIV or TB, always facing verbal and sometimes physical assaults, having to cut down suicide victims, etc.

Pilon said that given bargaining discussions have not been released, it is difficult to confirm whether the original short-term sickness benefit as proposed by the government is still intact.

I would suspect it is, considering that on Feb. 13 the government asked the union to begin negotiating essential services to be performed during a strike.

It's too bad. Although I believe the corrections officers' sick time is excessive, I also believe the government is asking too much in attempting to force on them a plan that is different from others in the public service.

Faced with such a draconian proposal, I would strike, too.

Doug Millroy, editor emeritus of The Sault Star

Article ID# 1445907

Share: [Facebook](#) | [Google](#) | [Delicious](#) | [Digg](#) | [Furl](#) | [Mixx](#) | [Linked In](#)

