



Strengthening Workers' Rights and Protections
Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

August 2026

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August 31, 2026

The Honourable Nolan Young
Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration
PO Box 697
Halifax, NS B3J 2T8

Dear Minister Young,

I write to you today to share policy proposals from the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour for consideration in the upcoming sitting of the Legislative Assembly. The Federation believes that now is the time to introduce legislation and policies that strengthen workers' rights and protections in Nova Scotia.

We recognize that your government has made progress on labour standards in recent years. Workers now have access to more unpaid sick time for themselves and their families, and Nova Scotia has become a leader in leave for victims of domestic violence.

Despite this progress, Nova Scotia continues to fall behind the rest of Canada when it comes to key minimum standards for workers. Workers in Nova Scotia have fewer holiday and vacation days than workers elsewhere in Canada, and the longest work week at 48 hours. The labour standards we do have are not universally enforced and the system is too dependent on vulnerable workers reporting infractions, rather than active enforcement like we have with Occupational Health and Safety.

The most effective way for workers to strengthen their rights remains by forming a union. Unionized workers are more likely to have stable work, paid sick days, adequate vacation time, and other workplace protections. But too many barriers remain in place for workers looking to exercise the democratic Charter right to unionize their workplace.

I hope you find this submission helpful as a guide to charting a better path forward for the working people of Nova Scotia.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Marsman', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Melissa Marsman, President
Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

About the Federation

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour is the central provincial voice for Nova Scotia workers and represents approximately 70,000 members from 27 affiliated unions. The Federation campaigns for justice and fairness for workers across the province.

[Acadia University Faculty Association](#) [ACTRA Maritimes](#) [Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 508](#) [Atlantic Academic Union](#) [Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers & Grain Millers International Union, Local 446](#) [Canadian Labour Congress](#) [Canadian Union of Postal Workers](#) [Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union](#) [Canadian Union of Public Employees](#) [Canadian Union of Public Employees Nova Scotia](#) [Cape Breton University Faculty Association](#) [Halifax Typographical Union](#) [International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers](#) [International Association of Firefighters](#) [The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees](#) [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 1928](#) [International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 727](#) [Mount Saint Vincent University Faculty Association](#) [Nova Scotia Nurses' Union](#) [Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union](#) [Nova Scotia Teachers Union](#) [Public Service Alliance of Canada](#) [Saint Mary's University Faculty Union](#) [Service Employees International Union, Local 2](#) [Seafarers International Union](#) [United Food and Commercial Workers Union](#) [United Steelworkers](#)

Summary of Recommendations

1. Amend minimum labour standards to grant all workers:
 - Ten (10) paid statutory holidays.
 - Three weeks vacation after one year of employment, and four weeks after 10 years.
 - Ten (10) paid sick days.
 - Overtime pay after working eight hours in a day or 40-hours in a week (when an employee exceeds 12 hours of work in a day, they should start earning double their wage).
 - Work schedules at least two weeks in advance.
2. Ban tip theft.
3. Improve enforcement of labour standards by:
 - Requiring employers to have cause before terminating employees who have been employed for 12 continuous months or more.
 - Establishing an active labour standards enforcement unit.
4. Protect the rights of workers to form a union and bargain collectively by:
 - Introducing single-step certification.
 - Banning the use of scab labour.

Recommendation 1: Improve minimum labour standards

Labour standards are the minimum protections granted to most employees in Nova Scotia and set the foundation for what working conditions look like across the province.

In their 2025 report, *The Foundations of Decent Work*, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia compared the labour standards that determine work-life balance with jurisdictions across the country, and found some serious shortcomings. As their research notes, overwork can have serious consequences for the health of workers, including burnout and shortened life expectancy.¹ Ensuring workers in Nova Scotia have the same minimum benefits and protections as their peers across the country should be a top priority for the government.

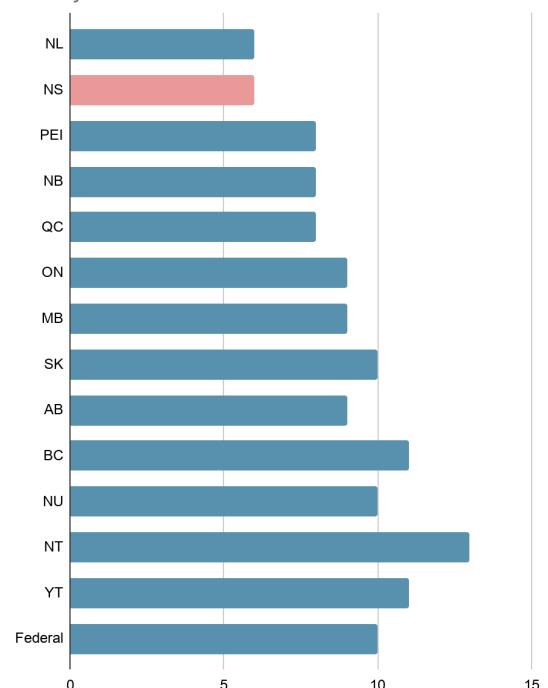
Protecting the health of workers is reason enough to address the shortcomings of minimum labour standards in Nova Scotia, but there will be benefits for employers as well. Research from Mental Health Research Canada shows that burnout can cost employers \$1000s per employee each year, and that time off was the most effective wellness program to combat this.² By ensuring workers in Nova Scotia have comparable access to holidays, vacation time, paid sick days, and overtime compensation, the government of Nova Scotia can demonstrate its commitment to the health of working people.

Statutory Holidays - Nova Scotia is tied with Newfoundland and Labrador for having the fewest statutory holidays in Canada, at six. The government should amend labour standards so all employees, at a minimum, can access 10-paid statutory holidays, matching the ones available in Canada's labour standards code:

New Year's Day, Good Friday, Victoria Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day.

Recommendation 1.1: Amend minimum labour standards to grant employees 10-paid statutory holidays each year.

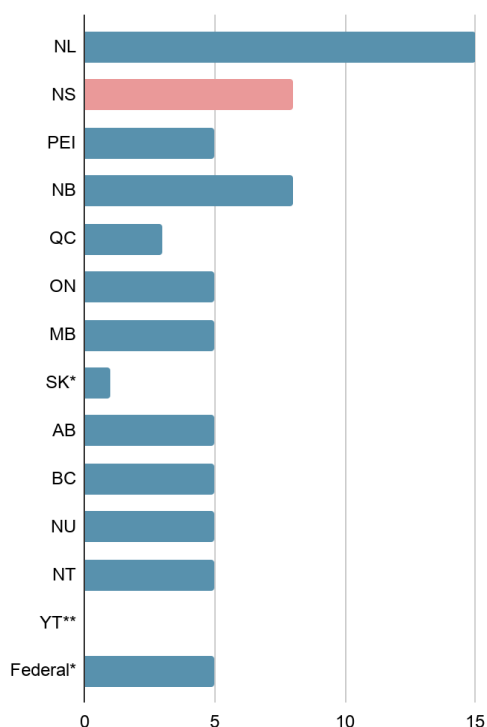
Figure 1.1: Statutory holidays by province and territory



¹ Rebecca Casey and Christine Saulnier. *The Foundation of Decent Work: An Evaluation of Nova Scotia Labour Standards*. (October, 2025). Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia Office. Halifax, Nova Scotia. 23.

² Lesli Martin, Michael Cooper, Clair Hlavacek, and Ishtar Yakhnis. *Mental Health in the Workplace 2025*. (June, 2025). Mental Health Research Canada, Canada Life, and Pollara. 4 and 22.

Fig 1.2: Years of service before earning 3-weeks vacation time



Vacation - Labour standards in Nova Scotia grant employees two weeks of vacation after a year of service. This increases to three weeks after eight years of service.

Nova Scotia trails every other jurisdiction, other than Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and the Yukon, when it comes to minimum vacation time for employees. Prince Edward Island just updated their labour standards so that employees will earn three weeks of vacation after five years of service, rather than eight.

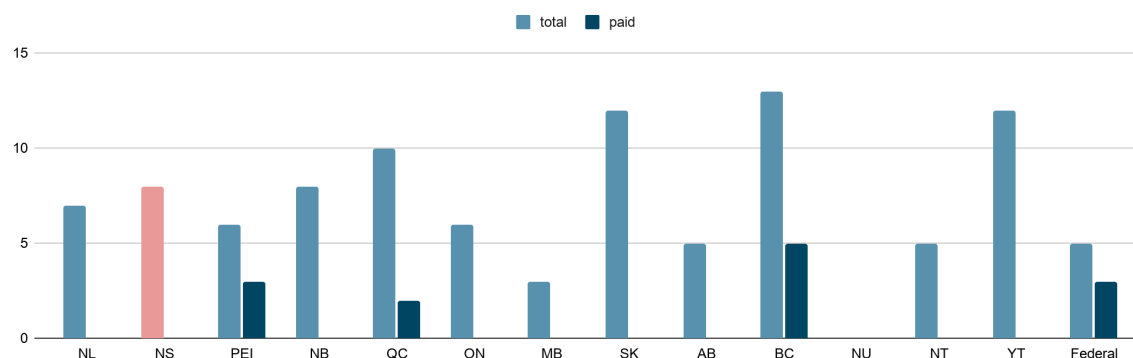
* Minimum labour standards in Saskatchewan and Federally grant workers a fourth year of vacation after 10 years of employment

**Minimum labour standards in the Yukon Territory never grant workers more than two weeks of vacation.

Recommendation 1.2: Amend minimum labour standards to grant all workers three weeks vacation after their first year of work, and four weeks after ten years.

Sick days - Nova Scotian workers have seen recent increases in access to unpaid sick days, and our province is in the middle of the pack when it comes to short-term unpaid leave due to illness. However, the most recent data from Statistics Canada shows that just 60.8 percent of workers in Nova Scotia report having paid time off due to illness, behind the national average of 64 percent.³ It should be noted that three of the provinces that offer fewer sick days than Nova Scotia do have stronger minimum standards on paid holidays and vacation time.

Fig 1.3: Sick days across provinces and territories (including family responsibility days)



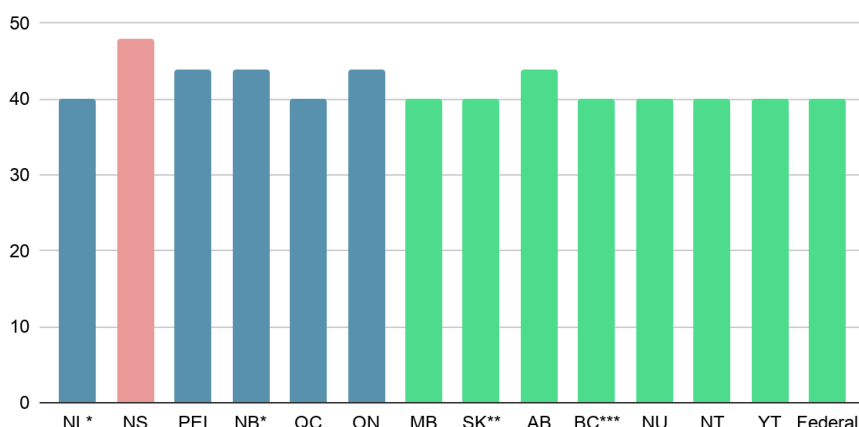
³ Statistics Canada. (2024, October 15). *Sick leave entitlement, 2023. Quality of Employment in Canada.* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2024001/article/00008-eng.htm>

Far too many Nova Scotians are still forced to go to work sick because they do not have access to paid time off, and cannot afford the loss of income. When workers go to work sick, they risk prolonging or worsening their illness and spreading that illness to coworkers, customers and clients. Lack of access to paid sick time is a workplace safety issue.

Recommendation 1.3: Amend minimum labour standards to grant all employees access to 10 employer-paid sick leave days that can also be used for taking care of family members

Overtime - Nova Scotia now has the longest work week in Canada, at 48 hours. Nova Scotia also doesn't set a daily threshold for overtime pay, which is the approach in most jurisdictions.

Fig 1.4: Threshold for overtime pay (green bars indicate jurisdictions with an 8-hour daily threshold)



Prince Edward Island recently changed the length of their work week from 48 to 44 hours.

*NL and NB cap overtime pay at 1.5 times the minimum wage.

**SK daily threshold is set at 10 hours for workers normally scheduled to work that many hours in the day.

***BC overtime is calculated at 2x regular pay when more than 12 hours are worked in a day.

Recommendation 1.4: Amend minimum labour standards so employees are entitled to overtime pay when they work more than 40-hours a week and set a daily overtime threshold of eight hours. When an employee exceeds 12-hours of work in a day, they should start earning double their wage.

Scheduling - In their recent report looking at precarious work in Nova Scotia, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Nova Scotia found that nearly one in three employees is experiencing precarious employment.⁴ One of the symptoms of precarious work is having an unpredictable work schedule, making it harder for workers to plan their life around their work schedule.

Recommendation 1.5: Amend minimum labour standards to require that employees must receive their work schedules at least two weeks in advance.

⁴ Daniel Cerdas Sandi, Rebecca Casey, and Rachel K. Brickner. *Decent or Precarious? Understanding the Quality of Employment in Nova Scotia*. (April, 2026). Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia Office. Halifax, Nova Scotia. 1.

Recommendation 2: Ban tip theft

There is no moral or business justification for employers stealing tips from their employees. These employees have some of the lowest incomes in Nova Scotia, and depend on their tips to make ends meet. Employers⁵ and workers agree it is time for Nova Scotia to join the majority of jurisdictions and ban tip theft.

Recommendation 2: Ban tip theft.

Recommendation 3: Improve enforcement of labour standards

Labour standards in Nova Scotia are too reliant on workers making complaints. Although the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration does some proactive investigations, these efforts represented just 1.25% of the inspections conducted in 2025.⁶ Resourcing a system of active enforcement, similar to the model that currently exists for Occupational Health and Safety, would ensure that labour standards are properly enforced across workplaces.

Research shows that 1 in 4 workers in Nova Scotia are afraid to speak up about labour standards violations or unsafe work for fear of retaliation by the employer.⁷ Ensuring workers feel safe reporting violations, along with active enforcement, will help make sure that labour standards are properly adhered to across Nova Scotia.

Protect workers from unjust termination - Labour standards only protect employees from unjust termination after 10 continuous years of employment with the same employer. Once they do, Nova Scotian workers have some of the strongest protections from termination of those anywhere in Canada. But for the first 10 years of employment, workers depend on minimum labour standards and have very little protection.

Decision makers could better protect these workers, and give them confidence to report labour standards violations, by amending labour standards so that employees employed by the same employer for 12 consecutive months cannot be dismissed or suspended without just cause. This would align Nova Scotia with the protections offered by the federal labour code.

Recommendation 3.1: Amend minimum labour standards so that employees employed by the same employer for 12-consecutive months cannot be dismissed or suspended without just cause.

⁵ Anis Heydari. (July 12, 2026). *Advocates, industry leaders call on Nova Scotia to outlaw 'tip theft.'* Anis Heydari. [cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/advocates-industry-leaders-call-on-nova-scotia-to-outlaw-tip-theft-9.7265565](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/advocates-industry-leaders-call-on-nova-scotia-to-outlaw-tip-theft-9.7265565)

⁶ Nova Scotia Legislature. (2026). *Hansard. Standing Committee on Human Resources. May 5, 2026.*

[nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/committees/standing/human-resources/archive/human-resources/hr2026may05](https://www.nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/committees/standing/human-resources/archive/human-resources/hr2026may05)

⁷ D. Sandi, R. Casey, and R. Brickner. *Decent of Precarious?* 49.

Set up an active enforcement unit - The current model of labour standards enforcement is too dependent on vulnerable workers coming forward to make complaints. It is encouraging to hear that the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is looking at including some labour standards in the inspection done by Occupational Health and Safety. However, workers would best be protected by an active enforcement unit within the Labour Standards division.

Recommendation 3.2: Set up an active enforcement unit for labour standards, modelled off Occupational Health and Safety.

Recommendation 4: Defend the right to free and fair collective bargaining

One of the key determinants to the quality of work in Nova Scotia is whether or not a workplace is unionized.

Figure 3.1: Unionized versus non-unionized⁸	Unionized	Non-unionized
Access to some paid sick time	87.6%	69.5%
Access to 10 or more paid sick days	71%	35.5%
Access to an employer funded benefits package	86.5%	64.4%
Access to an employer funded retirement plan	87.7%	60.9%
Gender pay gap ⁹	11%	21%

Not only do increased unionization rates mean better wages, benefits, and more equitable workplaces for employees, they also create a predictable environment that benefits employee and employer alike.

Recent research suggests the benefits of union density go beyond benefits to union members and management. In a paper released by the CCPA Manitoba Office and the Manitoba Research Alliance, increased union density was shown to reduce inequality and increase environmental and health outcomes for residents across Manitoba.¹⁰

Despite the evidence that the benefits of union density are so strong, Nova Scotia has made little progress over the past 30 years to increase the number of organized workplaces.

⁸ D. Sandi, R. Casey, and R. Brickner. *Decent or Precarious?* 48, 55, and 58.

⁹ Daniel Cerdas Sandi and Christine Saulnier. *Closing the Gaps: Gender Pay Inequality in Atlantic Canada*. (June, 2026). Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia Office. Halifax, Nova Scotia.3.

¹⁰ Ian Hudson, Mark Hudson, Fond Udoh and Anupam Das. *The Case for Pro-Union Public Policy: Unionization and Well-being in Canadian Provinces*. (September, 2025). Manitoba. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Manitoba Office and the Manitoba Research Alliance. 16 and 17.

Unionization rates in Nova Scotia have remained stagnant at around 30 percent since 1997.¹¹ This is the third lowest rate of unionization by province in Canada, with only Ontario and Alberta trailing. The government should work with Nova Scotia's labour movement to grant more workers access to the union advantage.

Single-step certification - Nova Scotia can remove a major barrier for workers looking to join a union by implementing single-step certification. Single-step certification is a straightforward and democratic process where a union is certified once a majority of workers in a workplace support forming a union, and sign authorization cards declaring this.

Currently in Nova Scotia, workers are forced through a secondary formal vote to unionize in their workplace, even when a majority of workers have signed membership cards showing their support. Moving to single-step certification would reduce conflict in the workplace and limit the ability of employers to engage in retaliatory campaigns that poison labour relations.

It would also reduce the administrative burden on the Labour Relations Board, freeing them up to better service employees and employers.

Recommendation 4.1: Implement single step certification in Nova Scotia.

Ban the use of scab labour - The right to strike is a fundamental aspect of our labour laws and is protected under the Canadian Constitution. That right is undermined when employers are allowed to use replacement workers, or 'scabs,' during legal strikes and lockouts.

The use of replacement workers extends labour disruptions, makes workplaces unsafe, creates tensions in communities, and violates the Charter rights of workers. This negatively impacts workers, their families, communities and the economy. It also removes the incentive for employers to bargain in good faith.

Anti-scab legislation exists in Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia, and Federal anti-scab legislation was passed with all-party support.

Recommendation 4.2: Ban the use of replacement workers, 'scabs,' in Nova Scotia.

¹¹ Statistics Canada. (2024, October 15). *Collective bargaining coverage rate, 2023. Quality of Employment in Canada.* <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2024001/article/00010-eng.htm>

Conclusion

Going forward, it will take workers, employers, advocates and decision makers working together to truly protect workers' rights in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour is willing to work as a partner in these efforts.

Together we can:

- Update Nova Scotia's labour standards to give workers in Nova Scotia the same protections as their peers across Canada.
- Ban tip theft.
- Start pro-active enforcement of labour standards and protect more workers from unjust termination, so the rules are applied evenly and fairly in all workplaces.
- Make it easier for workers to form a union, a right that is enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and defend collective bargaining by banning scab labour.

We know that we must do better for the working people of Nova Scotia. The gap between the minimum protections we offer our workers and those offered by other jurisdictions, has grown too large.

When asked about how to move forward, the government has said that improving minimum labour standards is a priority, but that it must be achieved through a balanced approach. In seeking this balance, it would be a serious mistake to view workers' rights and employers' rights as a zero-sum game.

Increasing the quality of work in Nova Scotia will improve productivity and increase employee retention. It will boost public health and reduce burnout. Supporting workers' dignity and economic growth are mutually reinforcing goals.

It is in this spirit that the Federation continues to work with all interested parties to improve the lives of working people in Nova Scotia.

If you have any questions about this document, don't hesitate to direct them to our office by emailing david@nslabour.ca or calling (902) 454-6735.