



March 3, 2017

Via email and post

Hon. Michael Coteau
Minister of Children and Youth Services/ Anti-Racism Directorate
14th Floor, 56 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3

Re: standing up for workers at Morton House, Barrie

Dear Mr. Coteau:

I am writing to ask you to step in on behalf of workers at Morton House in Barrie. After more than 11 months at the bargaining table with their employer and no agreement in sight, my members are running out of patience. In a nutshell, they are being strong-armed into taking dismal wages by an employer who can afford to do better, and they have had enough.

I think you would agree that no full-time worker should require a second or third job just to get by. Yet that is the reality for my members at Morton House.

My union represents 16 workers at this open custody residence for young males. The services my members provide to youth in the justice system are a critical part of what keeps Barrie a caring and supportive community. However, Morton House refuses to value the work my members do.

Executive Director Eric Evans claims he is merely acting on ministry instruction when he says he is unable to provide raises for his employees. According to Mr. Evans, your ministry also wants employees to stop eating meals with residents.

I have a difficult time believing this is happening. If it is indeed true that your office has instructed Mr. Evans to neglect his employees, then I hope you can help me understand the logic behind such instructions.

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These workers have endured nearly 15 years of no wage increases. Mr. Evans is only offering a \$1 raise for part-timers – and only because current wages are so low that the agency is unable to retain workers.

Currently, full-timers at Morton House are paid up to \$6 less an hour – part-timers up to \$8 less – than what workers make in similar organizations across the province. Many, if not all, employees at Morton House have second and third jobs just to get by.

And while he continues to deny my members basic, decent treatment, Mr. Evans continues to prioritize costly and unnecessary, aesthetic renovations rather than directing funding to improving services. Quality of care is sacrificed when workers are forced to take on a patchwork of part-time jobs, and when the faces of care providers are constantly changing due to turnover. Frankly, Mr. Evans' behaviour shows complete disregard for what his employees rely on to get to work in order to offer care, custody, and guidance.

In fact, nearly every day, I hear of more purchases, including a \$400 faucet and a \$1,200 couch. And I am told the shopping continues.

If Mr. Evans can afford these extravagances, then he can afford to raise the wages of his vastly underpaid employees. I sincerely hope you will agree.

Please help me tell Mr. Evans it is time he puts his hard-working employees before needless aesthetic upgrades. You can contact him at 705-737-2441, or mortonyouthservices@rogers.com. Please tell him to stop hiding behind so-called “ministry instructions,” and start valuing the work of his employees by paying them fairly.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

In solidarity,

[signature in original]

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

Enclosure

c: OPSEU Executive Board
Eric Evans, Executive Director, Morton House
Morton House Board of Directors:
Kathie Paul, President
June Bell, Vice-President
Douglas Shaw, Secretary
Murray Morton, Treasurer
William Paul
Sylvio Marchand
T. Don Jackson