

## **Court workers' strike reaches Duncan; Job Action: Native court workers' wages lower than comparable jobs**

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A rotating strike by B.C.'s native court workers made its way to Duncan on Tuesday.

"The government needs to do the right thing and bring them into the service agreement where they belong and where they were intended to be in the first place," said BC Government and Service Employees' Union communications officer **Chris Bradshaw**. "The idea is to get this on the government radar to put pressure on them."

B.C.'s native court workers help aboriginal clients navigate the criminal court system but they receive significantly less pay and benefits than workers performing similar jobs in the public service, according to the union.

At the heart of the workers' dispute is the failure of the B.C. government to bring these workers into the Community Social Services Employers' Association aboriginal bargaining unit when it was created in 2003. If that had happened, the workers would be paid much more.

The starting wage for a native court worker is only \$31,800 a year, compared to \$45,100 for a comparable classification under the Aboriginal Services agreement.

"Their agreement expired in 2011 so they've been operating on the old agreement. They haven't had a wage increase since 2009, that's five years," Bradshaw said.

"Since 2002, they've had a total of nine per cent in wage increases. The Consumer Price Index has gone up twice that since that time. They're starting to fall behind. Also, they co-pay their own benefit package rather than the employer paying for it."

When the idea of joining the agreement came up in negotiations, the employer, which is a non-profit group and not the government itself, said the change would be expensive.

"Their starting pay would be \$10,000 more than they're getting now and they would get full benefits as well. And the employer is telling us, 'We don't have the money; the government isn't funding it,'" Bradshaw explained. Across the

province, there are only 36 members in the bargaining units involved and some of them are counsellors.

"It's the 22 native court workers who would be impacted by this," Bradshaw said. "We're saying it's not a lot of money. We don't want to impact the people they are serving, which is why we are doing it this way.

"In the court system, the judges, lawyers and crown prosecutors really like having these people there because they essentially make the process work much more smoothly.

"They're providing unique services and they're not being paid a similar amount to other workers doing similar work. It's time to fix that."

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