

CONTRACTS Non-Union social service workers call for pay rise

By Steven Addison

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More than 2,500 non-union workers from the social service sector should find out this fall whether they'll receive pay raises, like their union counterparts.

The Ministry of Finance is reviewing the matter, Surrey-White Rock MLA Gordon Hogg said, and could make recommendations this fall to ensure the workers are "dealt with in a manner commensurate with the union."

"We pay for services on behalf of the people of this province, provided by a number of service providers, some of them union and some of them non-union," Hogg said.

"We recognize there were successful negotiations with the union sector, and we also have a responsibility with the non-union sector."

Sharon Bruce, who works at the nonunion South Surrey group home Dovecoat Bluff Estates, has been waiting for a raise and bonus since her unionized counterparts signed a new collective agreement this spring.

That agreement was part of a flurry deals which saw 137 contracts inked with government, covering some 300,000 workers – roughly 97 per cent of all public sector employees. The agreements were reached before the current contracts expired and qualified for a signing bonus.

Bruce, who works for a private contractor, has yet to see a raise.

"That's what we got — zero," said "You shouldn't have to belong to a union or an association to get a government raise—come on. Who's sitting on that money collecting interest?"

Hogg said it has been past practice to provide non-union workers in the social service sector similar raises to those received by unions. He's spoken to Finance minister Carole Taylor, and Premier Gordon Campbell about the issue, and expects a resolution this fall.

It could take up to \$20 million to bring the non-workers up to par.

"There is a recognition that should be addressed. The principle (is) trying to treat our employees with equity and respect," Hogg said.

"If you're an organization that is non-union you are doing the exact same work (but) your union colleagues have received the increase and incentives."

Hogg said he's received assurances the issue will be reviewed, and said he's optimistic it will be resolved.