

**INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS
LOCAL 793**



**Submission to the:
House of Commons'
Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs**

**In respect of its study:
*In Support for Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and
Individuals Through a Second Wave of COVID-19***

INTRODUCTION

The International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793 (IUOE Local 793) is a well-established trade union, originally chartered in 1919. IUOE Local 793 has its roots in the construction industry, but also services both industrial and mining sectors in both the Province of Ontario and the Territory of Nunavut. Today, we proudly represent over 17,000 Crane and Heavy Equipment Operators, industrial workers, and miners within our jurisdiction. IUOE Local 793 is the largest local of the IUOE in Canada.

More recently, members of IUOE Local 793 work in the largest mining operation in Baffin Island, Nunavut, representing more than 1000 production employees north of the arctic circle. Approximately fifteen percent of our members working on Baffin Island are Inuit land claims beneficiaries living in the far north communities within Baffin Island. Other Inuit members have relocated south and are living in urban areas across Canada and travelling to Baffin Island to work.

IUOE Local 793's membership continues to grow with our emphasis on representing Indigenous workers who have for too long been underrepresented in the skilled trades. Local 793's training arm, the Operating Engineers Training Institute ("OETIO"), has a history of working with Indigenous employment and training organizations to remove barriers to Indigenous people in the skilled trades.

As advocates for all our members we are keenly aware of the different impact this Covid-19 crisis is having on our Indigenous members compared to their non-Indigenous workmates.

THREE AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION

There are three ways in which IUOE Local 793 recommends this Government support Indigenous communities, businesses, and individuals through the 2nd wave of Covid-19:

1. Commitment to improve essential infrastructure, including broadband connectivity, water service and housing, to facilitate participation in economic recovery and reduce the disproportionate risk faced by Indigenous communities to health crises.
2. Assistance to remove barriers to Indigenous persons entering the skilled trades including funding to bring training to the communities to eliminate the need to travel to Covid-19 hotspots.
3. Prioritizing of rapid testing for Indigenous people to make it possible for all our members to work and be sure they are not exposing vulnerable communities to transmission risk

INFRASTRUCTURE TO COMBAT PANDEMIC

The impact of Covid-19 on communities without robust sanitation and healthcare infrastructure and with overcrowded housing is well known to this committee. This Committee has heard from witnesses about Covid-19's impact on tourist and other businesses. Indigenous communities have been hard hit by this pandemic not only in terms of health outcomes but also in its economic impact.

Significant improvements to underlying infrastructure are crucial for both the health and for the economic survival for Indigenous communities. Economic recovery for Indigenous communities will depend on facilitating ongoing employment opportunities for Indigenous workers and Indigenous businesses.

it is our recommendation that a firm commitment to fund and facilitate telecommunications construction work should be a priority.

Our members currently trying to work from home and assist their children pursue distance-learning are struggling without adequate or reliable broadband internet connection. As IUOE Local 79, has ramped up its efforts to provide services to its members on-line, the lack of connectivity has also been an impediment to maintaining our connection to our members.

Utilities installation construction work can also serve as a source of apprenticeships for Indigenous workers, enabling new Indigenous workers to train and learn on projects near their own communities.

We therefore fully support the Universal Broadband Fund and the targets that have been announced. We encourage the Government to ensure that a sufficient portion of that funding be allocated to Indigenous communities to ensure that effective long-term infrastructure is put in place.

We are also distressed by the continuing existence of significant water treatment problems on Indigenous communities all over the country. The lack of readily available safe water is an increased risk factor for communities, as is any situation that requires individuals to travel to high Covid-19 infection areas to obtain drinking water. The priority of water treatment infrastructure work must not be delayed or deprioritized because of Covid-19.

The creation of the Indigenous Community Support Fund is an excellent step taken by this government to support Indigenous communities. However, it does not appear to us that this fund is available for or supports the needs for infrastructure construction related to Covid-19 risks. In late October the Ontario government announced it was putting aside 1.05 billion in combined provincial and federal funds for "Covid 19 Resilience Infrastructure Funding" which includes funds for retrofits and upgrades to schools, childcare facilities, recreation centres, and other renovations enable physical distancing.

Our recommendation is that a significant portion of this fund be dedicated to Covid-19 related infrastructure improvements for indigenous and northern communities and/or that the Federal Government also consider a Covid-19 Infrastructure plan and funding specific to the infrastructure needs of Indigenous people. We add our voice to the call for long-term and stable funding solutions for Indigenous infrastructure needs.

TAKE TRAINING INITIATIVES TO THE COMMUNITIES

While there needs to be an adequate commitment to infrastructure funding, steps also need to be taken to ensure that Indigenous people have the training opportunities to be able to capitalize on the work opportunities.

Recognizing that Indigenous clients have different needs than our non-Indigenous clients, in 2016 OETIO developed the Aboriginal/Indigenous Pre-Apprenticeship Program, which was funded by Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Between 2016 to 2019, 41 Indigenous persons have gone through IUOE Local 793's pre-apprenticeship program with 33 of those people becoming registered Heavy Equipment Apprentices.

What is currently missing is cooperation to facilitate the provision of such training in or near the northern and Indigenous communities where the people truly need it.

IUOE Local 793's successes in training Indigenous workers has been recognized by a number of organizations, including academia who are seeking to collaborate with us on this very topic. IUOE Local 793 is currently participating on a research collaboration with the Toronto Community Benefits Network, York University's Global Labour Research Centre, and Mitacs, with the goal of studying the past and present factors behind Indigenous under-representation in the GTA's construction industry. The research team is committed to learning from IUOE Local 793's experience in identifying and removing these barriers to ensure better inclusion of Indigenous persons in the robust GTA construction industry.

OETIO/IUOE Local 793 also sits on the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario (AABO) and the six LINK Steering Committees throughout the Ontario.

In October 2014 IUOE Local 793/OETIO implemented an Aboriginal Engagement Plan. We want the people who do the work of resource development projects in mining, hydro projects, construction, roads, water sewage to have good union representation through us, and we understand that those people and businesses need to come from Indigenous communities. IUOE Local 793 needs to replace retiring heavy equipment and crane operators with a "Made in Canada Solution" by tapping into the Aboriginal workforce.

The Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario undertook a study to determine barriers for Indigenous people to enter a career in the skilled trades. Their research identified three primary barriers:

- **Education:** Does the candidate have a grade 12? If so, will they be successful in trades school?
- **Transportation:** Does the candidate have a driver's license? Do they have reliable transportation?
- **Mobility:** Is the candidate willing to leave their community for work or school?

In our experience, there are many factors that contribute to Indigenous training success. All of these are complicated by dealing with the realities of Covid-19:

1. Hiring Indigenous Co-ordinator and Instructors to deliver the programs.
2. Providing tutoring after-hours to those who are seeking assistance.
3. Providing airport Pickup from Ottawa Airport to OETIO's Morrisburg Campus.
4. Welcome packages for each apprentice and pre-apprentice upon arrival at the OETIO to make them feel at home.
5. Providing extracurricular activities after hours such as Indigenous community activities, sporting events, tour of Ottawa, shopping etc.
6. Assisting with booking and traveling to medical/eye/hearing/dental appointments.
7. Assisting with setting up bank accounts.
8. Arranging for traditional food to be on site while Indigenous students are attending OETIO and the ability for students to bring foods they are most accustomed to.
9. Offering translation services, when required.
10. Requiring all instructors participate in a professional development session on Indigenous Awareness topics such as: History, Canada's Indigenous Chronology, Aboriginal territorial Protocol, Aboriginal Diagnostics, Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Closing the Gap.
11. Setting up counselling sessions and supports, when required, such as mental health, suicide prevention, alcohol and drugs and AA sessions.

OETIO normally also does what it can to bring apprenticeship training to the communities it wishes to serve. Before the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, it participated in the following initiatives:

- Attends between 30 and 40 Indigenous Career Fairs/Job Fairs in the spring of each year to promote our pre-apprenticeship programs/apprenticeship programs/becoming a member of IUOE Local 793.
- Hosts Women in Trades Loader and Haul Truck Programs, which it has done at our Morrisburg Campus near Ottawa, but also on location in Moose Factory, Moosonee, Cochrane, Timmins, and Nunavut.
- Run programs throughout the season to train Inuit heavy equipment operators from across Nunavut for the mining industry, in connection with both Arctic College and major employers in the Territory.
- Provides on-site training of Inuit for Baffinland Iron Ore at Mary River, Nunavut.

For most of 2020 of course, our hands-on programs and programs in northern communities have been shut down and the cohort of Indigenous pre-apprentices, as well as all other Indigenous trainees have been put on hold until at the earliest 2021.

Currently mobility is one of the largest factors impeding the entry of Indigenous workers based in the north into the skilled trade. The majority of designated Training Delivery Agents including OETIO are based in the south, which are of course currently among the provinces Covid-19 hot spots. Now more than ever the ability to provide training in or near the communities of the north to remove unnecessary travel will facilitate training.

The costs of obtaining, maintaining, and transporting the heavy equipment necessary for hands-on learning has so far been a serious impediment to bringing training to the northern communities where it would be of most value to those entering the workforce. Sharing information, accessing grants and other measures to encourage the work already being done by TDAs to facilitate an expansion of access to skilled trades training will ensure that northern communities are not left still further behind after the pandemic.

PRIORITIZE RAPID TESTING FOR AT-RISK COMMUNITIES

IUOE Local 793 recommends that this Government prioritize the availability of rapid testing for Indigenous persons. This measure would close a gap in health and safety monitoring which is currently acting as an impediment to Indigenous workers continuing to work and support their families.

Workers living in very vulnerable communities such as Indigenous communities in the north and south of Ontario and in Nunavut are obviously attuned to ensuring that they do not bring Covid-19 home from a jobsite.

An increase of availability of rapid testing would be a step towards ameliorating this situation. Individual members in remote and vulnerable communities are having to choose between working and potentially exposing their communities to risk, or staying at home and losing the work and the progress that has been made in having northern work go to northern workers.

Some employers are looking into providing their own private testing, but this currently still an expensive option and not one being exercised by many of the smaller construction employers. Making this type of testing available on construction jobsites, for Indigenous workers would assist in allaying concerns about transmission and enable work to continue.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Committee for inviting us to speak on this very important topic