



Hon. David Piccini

Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development Queen's Park
400 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario
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J4MW is writing to urge the Ministry of Labour to conduct a thorough investigation into the mass termination at Highline Mushrooms (Wellington facility). We are urging the investigation to be conducted to examine whether or not Highline Mushrooms violated either the *Employment Standards Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* in its layoff of almost 300 employees, and in particular, whether Highline Mushrooms:

- Notified the Ministry of Labour in advance
- Complied with provisions relating to severance and termination pay
- Complied with holiday pay and vacation pay requirements
- Complied with health and safety provisions
- Complied with minimum wage requirements
- Complied with requirements regarding workers' compensation

The MOL has previously undertaken pilot projects to investigate the working conditions of "vulnerable workers." J4MW believes that this situation is also one that warrants a thorough investigation. Hundreds of temporary foreign workers who have left their families in the Global South to produce perishable produce in Ontario are facing unemployment. It is our understanding that the company remains profitable and this callous business decision will have far reaching ramifications well outside the geographic catchment area of Wellington, Ontario. Highline Mushrooms operates several plants across Canada and ships its produce to the USA and Japan, and right here in Ontario, employs temporary foreign workers to make it happen. The onerous conditions of the federally governed Temporary Foreign Worker Program creates undue hardship on those employed under its auspices.

It is imperative that the workers are accorded their full protections under Ontario's employment and health and safety legislation. As you are aware, litigation against other agricultural employers have illustrated the multiple barriers to access to justice that this specific community face as a result of their precarious employment and immigration status. The Ministry of Labour has fined Highline on multiple occasions - at its [Wellington](#) plant (\$90,000 in 2019) as well as its [Leamington](#) (\$75,000 in 2019) and [Kingsville](#) (\$115,000 in 2025) plants with respect to worker safety - as such the Ministry is aware of a history of flouting worker health and safety legislation in Ontario by this employer.

It is alarming that in a period of increasing food insecurity, where alarming numbers of Ontarians cannot afford healthy foods, that the pillars of our agricultural system are in the hands of corporations such as the Sumitomo Corporation, parent company of Highline Mushrooms, which has devastated the lives of hundreds of families. Public health units in Eastern Ontario have raised the alarm regarding rising rates of insecurity in the region. Food insecurity is a widespread issue that is increasingly being seen at the regional, provincial, and national levels. In 2023, nearly one in four households (24 percent) experienced food insecurity in the eastern region of Ontario, a significant rise from 16 percent the previous year.

Public health units across the province monitor food affordability by comparing the costs of food and rent to various individual and household income scenarios. Findings from these scenarios show that an individual receiving Ontario Works in eastern Ontario struggles to afford both food and rent, with a monthly deficit ranging from -\$263 to -\$795. [Data collected](#) also indicates that low-income households face similar challenges and are unable to meet their basic needs after paying for rent, utilities, transportation, clothing, medications and other essentials.

This decision has only exacerbated the region's food insecurity through the mass termination of hundreds of low-wage workers as a result of their immigration status will be excluded from most statistical surveys,

We look forward to your announcement whether the MOL will undertake a proactive inspection and address the concerns raised by former employees and our organization

Regards

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