

New COVID-19 Changes To The Alberta Employment Standards Code



On April 6, 2020, the Alberta Government announced further temporary changes to the *Employment Standards Code* (the “Code”), effective immediately, to support employees and employers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These temporary changes, intended to address issues employers and employees are experiencing in relation to the current economic crisis and isolation requirements, are summarized below:

Changes to Employee Leave

- The Alberta Government has introduced a new unpaid job-protected leave for employees caring for children affected by school or daycare closures and caring for ill or self-isolated family members due to COVID-19:
 - The 90 day eligibility requirement has been waived.
 - The length of the leave is flexible and linked to guidance from the Chief Medical Officer of Alberta.
 - No medical note is required.
 - Regular personal and family responsibility leave rules will continue to apply to other circumstances where employees require leave.

Changes to Notice Requirements

- The Alberta Government has temporarily removed a number of notice requirement rules contained in the Code:
 - Removal of the requirement for employers to give 24 hours’ written notice of shift change.
 - Removal of the requirement for employers to give 2 weeks’ notice to change work schedules for employees under an averaging agreement.
 - Removal of the requirement for an employer to provide group termination notice to employees and any applicable union when the employment of 50 or more employees at a single location is being terminated.
 - Individual termination notice requirements have not changed.
 - Notice must still be provided by the employer to the Minister of Labour and Immigration as soon as reasonably practical.

Changes to Temporary Layoff Provisions

- The Alberta Government has temporarily changed the temporary layoff provisions in the Code:
 - The duration of temporary layoffs has been increased from 60 days to 120 days:
 - This change is retroactive for any COVID-19 related temporary layoffs that occurred on or after March 17, 2020.

Additional Changes

- The Alberta Government has stated that it will streamline approvals for those who require a modification to current employment standards variances and exemptions due to COVID-19.

These changes will remain in place for as long as the Alberta Government deems them necessary and as long as the Public Health Emergency Order remains in place.

For more information on how the Alberta Government is providing support to employers and employees see this resource.

By Jean Torrens and Megan Kheong of MLT Aikins LLP