



# FTR

# QUARTERLY

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**HUMAN RESOURCES  
LAW AND ADVOCACY**



# WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE – HIDDEN PROFILE, HIGH STAKES

There is no shortage of high-profile legal issues within the human resources area. From class actions, to human rights claims, to strikes and labour disruptions, a number of cases have made front page news.

But turn to page two, and you'll find an area of human resources law that rarely makes the front page yet can be of critical importance to the health of organizations: workplace safety and insurance.

"The financial stakes for even a single Workplace Safety Insurance Board case or appeal can be huge – in the hundreds of thousands of dollars – so getting the best representation possible makes smart business sense," says Joseph Cohen-Lyons, a Toronto office lawyer and co-chair of the firm's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board ("WSIB") Practice Group. "We often see employers who don't participate in the process. This sometimes leads to unfavourable decisions – and in many cases it is too late to correct."

The simple fact is that the proper management of WSIB claims and financial issues can save employers significant amounts of money.

"The WSIB process can be long and complicated," says Edward O'Dwyer, a lawyer in Hicks Morley's Toronto office. "What we bring is an institutional knowledge

of the process and procedures – and that lets us provide expert and efficient representation that wouldn't be possible otherwise without this extensive experience."

## BEYOND CLAIMS – A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

While managing WSIB claims and appeals to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal ("WSIAT") is a critical element of cost control, effective program management goes far beyond the claims process.

"One of our greatest strengths is seeing beyond individual claims to how we can improve overall systems and strategies for our clients," says Samantha Seabrook, a Hicks Morley Toronto office lawyer and co-chair of the firm's WSIB Practice Group. "It is not only winning a single appeal – it's about working with our clients to develop long-term strategies on managing claims costs and reducing injuries in the workplace. We have a team of workers' compensation lawyers who help clients do that."

This type of WSIB program management can yield many benefits that go beyond the pure financial. Fewer accidents and claims can mean minimized disruption to operations, increased productivity and higher staff retention levels. Those types of intangibles can add substantial value to an organization.

“It’s a key part of what we do – adding value for our clients throughout the process, not just at the hearing or appeal stage,” says Kathryn Meehan, a lawyer in the firm’s Waterloo office.

### The new frontier in workers’ compensation is mental stress claims.

“We advise on return to work plans, how to address deficiencies in information received from treating health practitioners, lack of cooperation by an employee in the return to work process, how to handle requests from employees for accommodation, modified duties and, of course, the legal risks and implications for termination of an employee with a workplace injury or illness.”

## MENTAL STRESS – THE NEW FRONTIER

The new frontier in workers’ compensation is mental stress claims. Last year, the WSIAT refused to apply the statutory provision limiting benefits for mental stress to traumatic mental stress cases, which paves the way for more claims for ordinary or cumulative workplace stress.

“This will be particularly expensive for Schedule 2 employers, who pay their WSIB claims costs dollar for dollar plus an administrative charge to the WSIB,” says Jodi Gallagher Healy, a lawyer in the firm’s London office. “Stress management resources, robust workplace investigation processes and effective back to work

strategies for psychological disabilities will be key to managing liability.”

Another growth area relating to WSIB issues is claims for ongoing loss of earnings as a result of chronic pain disability.

“From an employer’s perspective, this can be very concerning and frustrating,” says Meehan. “When an employee suffers a minor repetitive strain injury to his or her wrist at work, and then claims for total disability and full loss of earnings benefits until age 65 as a result of chronic pain disorder, this can be a major financial exposure for the employer. We’ve helped a number of clients successfully defend these claims.”

In one recent case, the firm helped an employer avoid more than \$500,000 in claims costs.

“We represented a client at a WSIAT hearing where the worker was claiming full loss of earnings benefits until age 65,” says Seabrook. “We were able to use expert medical evidence to show that the continuing disability was not work-related and successfully defended against the worker’s appeal.”

## THE HICKS MORLEY ADVANTAGE

Legal issues related to WSIB claims intersect with many other areas in the human resources sphere – such as occupational health and safety, human rights and attendance management. Because Hicks Morley provides expertise across the full spectrum of human resources issues, firm lawyers understand the larger context – and can provide expert advice on the interaction between these different areas.

It’s an approach that not only provides greater efficiencies for employers, it ensures that many potential issues are addressed proactively – before major problems emerge.



## BILL 168 – OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY FIVE YEARS LATER

Five years ago, amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (“*OHSA*”) introduced by Bill 168 codified employers’ obligations to prevent workplace violence and harassment against their workers. The new law imposed obligations on employers to create and post policies dealing with workplace violence and harassment, to create programs to implement those policies and to conduct risk assessments for workplace violence.

There have been many developments in this area since Bill 168 was passed. These include the impact of Bill 168 on doling out discipline, the jurisdictional scope of the Ontario Labour Relations Board (“*OLRB*”) regarding workplace harassment and the intersection of Bill 168 with other workplace legislation.

### DISCIPLINE AFTER BILL 168

Since the passage of Bill 168, a number of labour arbitrators have recognized that workplace violence must be considered a more serious form of misconduct. In a seminal decision, *Kingston (City) v. Canadian Union of Public Employees*,

*Local 109*, Arbitrator Newman was faced with a grievor who uttered a death threat against another employee. In considering whether termination was an appropriate disciplinary response, she identified four key considerations that flow from Bill 168:

- i. threats constitute workplace violence under the *OHSA*;
- ii. employees must report incidents of workplace violence (including threats) and employers must investigate and respond to such incidents in a timely and effective manner;

- iii. because threats are included in the definition of workplace violence, arbitrators should give greater weight to the seriousness of the incident in deciding if dismissal is appropriate; and
- iv. workplace safety must be considered in assessing the appropriate discipline.

Put simply, Bill 168 has increased awareness of the importance of an employer's duty to protect employees from workplace violence and harassment. The majority of arbitrators have adopted the view that where such incidents arise, employers may now be entitled to respond with more serious disciplinary measures than might have been reasonable prior to Bill 168. However, this does not necessarily mean that every incident of workplace violence will warrant termination. Each case must still be assessed on its specific facts.

Put simply, Bill 168 has increased awareness of the importance of an employer's duty to protect employees from workplace violence and harassment.

Recent court cases have also confirmed the need to consider the particular facts of the case, even where workplace violence is present. In *Phanlouvang v. Northfield Metal Products (1994) Ltd. et al*, the plaintiff was terminated for cause after he allegedly punched a co-worker in the face. The Court noted that the climate had changed since the introduction of Bill 168. However, it ultimately found that dismissal was not justified, stating that a finding that the plaintiff breached the *OHS*A “does not override the need to adopt a contextual

and proportional approach in determining whether the employer has made out a defence of just cause.”

### THE OLRB'S POSITION ON EMPLOYER OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO HARASSMENT

Another area of development is the OLRB's jurisdiction to consider workplace harassment complaints.

While the amendments to the *OHS*A in relation to workplace violence were substantive, and required employers to provide a violence-free workplace, the workplace harassment obligations were primarily procedural. They require employers to prepare a workplace harassment policy, implement a program and an investigation procedure and train workers on the policy and program.

Some early OLRB decisions supported the view that a workplace harassment complaint at the OLRB could be dismissed on a preliminary basis because there was no substantive requirement to provide a harassment-free workplace. The OLRB has recently clarified that position.

In *Ljuboja v. Aim Group Inc.*, an employer sought the early dismissal of a worker's complaint that he was fired for making a harassment complaint. The OLRB confirmed there is no obligation to provide a harassment-free workplace and that workplace harassment obligations are entirely procedural. However, it declined to dismiss the complaint, reasoning that it would undermine the procedural process mandated by the *OHS*A if employers were free to engage in reprisals against workers for making complaints. The OLRB concluded that a worker who files a harassment complaint is acting in compliance with, or

seeking the enforcement of, the *OHSA* and that activity is protected from reprisal.

Following the *Ljuboja* decision, the OLRB may now deal with reprisals against workers who file workplace harassment complaints with their employers. [Note: As we go to press, legislation has been tabled by the Ontario government which, if passed, will impose a new duty on employers to ensure that an investigation is conducted into incidents and complaints of workplace harassment and to inform the complainant and respondent of the results and any corrective action taken, among other things. These changes are outlined in our *FTR Now* of October 28, 2015, “Ontario Introduces Legislation to Address Sexual Violence and Harassment.”]

### INTERSECTION WITH OTHER AREAS

Another important development that we are seeing is the inclusion of claims related to employer obligations under Bill 168 in other areas of the law. For example, a claim of workplace violence may also give rise to claims for benefits under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* for physical injury and/or traumatic mental stress. It may also give rise to a claim of constructive dismissal due to an alleged unsafe work environment or harassment.

The most notable area of overlap is in the area of human rights. Because the definition of workplace harassment under the *OHSA* would also include claims of harassment under the *Human Rights Code*, many of the same issues arise in human rights cases. It is not uncommon to see individuals file claims in multiple forums, including the OLRB, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and with a court or arbitrator. Employers must be ready to respond to such claims on all fronts.

### GOING FORWARD

Over the past five years, employers and employees have become much more aware of the rights and obligations under Bill 168 and decision-makers are more willing to weigh in on these issues. Employers should continue to review their policies, procedures and risk assessments to ensure that they remain current, compliant and effective – and are ready to face the next five years.



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## DEVELOPING AN ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT PLAN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

According to the Conference Board of Canada, the estimated direct cost of absenteeism to the Canadian economy in 2012 was \$16.6 billion. Employee absences also have intangible effects on the workplace: they add to the workload of other employees, disrupt work schedules and hurt morale. Despite these facts, less than half of Canadian organizations currently track employee absences.<sup>1</sup>

Tracking absenteeism is only the first step – effectively managing and reducing absenteeism is the ultimate goal. This is much easier said than done: managing absenteeism is one of the thorniest workplace issues employers have to deal with.

The first line of defence is a focus on prevention and putting in place appropriate accident prevention and safety programs. This may involve conducting risk assessments and taking action to eliminate or control identified risks. Services that an employer offers to help support employees' physical and mental health well-being should be effectively communicated.

Also critical is a properly developed and applied attendance management program ("AMP"), administered in combination with appropriate workplace policies that

enhance health promotion, injury prevention and disability management.

Because attendance management requires an investment of time and financial resources, all levels of the organization should be committed to the AMP. Front-line supervisors and managers, as those who have the most contact with ill and injured employees, must be given the training and resources necessary to understand their obligations and to deal with issues appropriately. Middle and senior management must be committed to creating a workplace that recognizes the importance of regular attendance and to providing the necessary resources to achieve that goal.

An AMP can establish expectations for attendance and identify thresholds beyond which certain consequences occur. However, the goal of the AMP should be to encourage



attendance at work and provide assistance to employees in achieving regular attendance. Here are ten tips that can help you structure an AMP:

### 1. Take a customized approach

Do not take another employer's AMP and implement it. Every plan should be customized to the individual workplace and may have to be further modified for different areas within that workplace.

### 2. Consult the union

Where the workplace is unionized, involve the union. It also has an interest in ensuring that absenteeism is minimized.

### 3. Establish clear roles

Establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities for management, supervisors, human resources professionals, employees, and, where applicable, the union and healthcare providers employed by the company.

### 4. Determine employee's control over absences

Differentiate between the disciplinary culpable absences (blameworthy absences for which the employee should be held responsible) and the non-disciplinary non-culpable absences (those that cannot be controlled by the employee, such as illness or disability).

### 5. Exclude statutory leaves

Ensure that statutorily protected leaves are excluded when calculating an employee's absenteeism, such as protected leaves under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*. Similarly, absences under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997* are generally excluded.

### 6. Establish the parameters for obtaining appropriate medical information

Generally, you are entitled to know:

- nature of illness (not a diagnosis);
- prognosis, and whether the disability is temporary or permanent;
- expected date of return to work;
- limitations/required accommodation; and
- compliance with treatment program and the impact any treatment program may have on an employee's ability to do the job.

Where reasonable, you can request more information or clarification of the employee's medical status.

Differentiate between the disciplinary culpable absences ... and the non-disciplinary non-culpable absences.

### 7. Set up a contact system

Pursue absenteeism issues proactively and constructively by implementing a system that calls for regular contact with absent employees, aimed at assisting the employee to obtain appropriate support and medical treatment. Discuss appropriate modified duties in order to enable the employee to return to work. The longer the leave of absence, the lower the probability that the absent employee will return to any form of employment. (The odds of an employee returning to work from a health-related leave of absence drops to 50% after six months away from the workplace.<sup>2</sup> This is one reason why the WSIB recently revamped its return to work program to encourage early intervention).



## 8. Factor in human rights obligations

Comply with obligations under the *Human Rights Code* – and ensure that all communications are clearly documented and retained. The employer should be able to respond to the following questions:

- Is the absence due to a disability?
- What are the limitations on the employee's performance or functions caused by the disability?
- What challenges are created for the employer by those limitations or otherwise by the absences themselves?
- In what ways could the employee's job be modified to suit those limitations?
- What are the implications to the employer of each of the possible modifications in terms of cost, productivity, timeliness, quality, employee morale, interference with the collective agreement, risk of re-injury or recurrence for the employee or health or safety risks to others?
- If job modification is not possible or if it would impose an unreasonable burden on the employer, what other possibilities for accommodation exist?
- What will be the effect on the employer of such modification?

- What will be the effect on the employee of modifying the existing job or of implementing the other possibilities?
- Is the employee (and where applicable, the union) co-operating with the accommodation process?
- If accommodation is impossible or unreasonable, and the employee continues to be absent, are there alternatives to termination?

## 9. Comply with collective agreement

Be sure your policy complies with any collective agreement in place.

## 10. Apply discretion as needed

Balance the requirement to apply the AMP in a consistent manner with the need to exercise discretion; the employer must be prepared to assess individual circumstances.

Developing and administering an effective AMP requires a commitment of time and resources. However, achieving the goal of regular attendance and creating a supportive work environment will more than offset the costs.

<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board of Canada, *Missing in Action: Absenteeism Trends in Canadian Organizations*, Briefing, September 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board of Canada, *Creating an Effective Workplace Disability Management Plan*, Briefing, October 2013.



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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Stay informed about the latest legal developments and best practices with our continuing professional development sessions focused on in-house counsel.

[VISIT HICKSMORLEY.COM/ADVANTAGE FOR MORE DETAILS.](http://HICKSMORLEY.COM/ADVANTAGE)

### **FTR QUARTERLY'S NEXT CHAPTER**

In our 2014 Hicks Morley client communications survey, we asked *FTR Quarterly* readers whether they would prefer to receive Hicks Morley updates and publications in print, or electronically.

**The verdict is in.** We will be transitioning all of the timely, insightful content you rely on into new user- and mobile-friendly electronic formats at the end of this year. Hicks Morley will continue to publish a number of electronic updates on issue-specific and sector-specific topics, keeping you informed about the latest developments and best practices in the field of human resources law.

[VISIT HICKSMORLEY.COM/SUBSCRIBE.HTM](http://HICKSMORLEY.COM/SUBSCRIBE.HTM) TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND MANAGE YOUR PREFERENCES.

### CLIENT CONFERENCES 2016 ON YOUR MARK

Our biennial, complimentary client conferences reflect our commitment to keeping you informed about the latest developments and best practices, including strategies that can help your organization's human resources management.

Please mark the following dates in your calendar, and join us this coming Spring at a location near you.

Toronto: Breakfast sessions at our office with eight dates to choose from:  
April 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21, 26 and 28

Ottawa: May 6      Kingston: May 9      London: May 30      Waterloo: June 1

[VISIT HICKSMORLEY.COM FOR MORE DETAILS.](http://HICKSMORLEY.COM)

## EXCELLENCE IN ADVOCACY



David Bannon joined Hicks Morley just one year ago, but he has worked his entire 21-year career in the labour and employment area.

We talked to David about his career, his recent move to Hicks Morley and the trends he sees developing in the labour and employment area.

### **Tell us a bit about your background – where are you from originally?**

I grew up in Campbellford, on the Trent River between Peterborough and Belleville. It's just a small town, but it's a nice place to grow up until you hit a certain age. I lived there until I went to Laurier to do my political science degree.

### **What interested you in law?**

I had always liked public speaking and debating – and I knew the sciences weren't for me. So in terms of a professional degree, law seemed like a good fit.

I finished my four-year degree at Laurier and went to Osgoode Hall at York. In terms of an

educational fit, it was everything I had hoped it would be. I really enjoyed the classes.

### **Was labour and employment always your primary interest?**

I developed the interest as a summer and articling student at a full-service law firm. I recognized that you could get on your feet as an advocate much earlier than you could in a traditional litigation practice. Even though I had fantastic litigation experience at that firm, I was still drawn to the labour and employment area. I really enjoyed the fact that you needed to develop ongoing relationships and an intimate understanding of the client's business, because you were

involved in their HR business decisions on a regular basis.

I left that firm in 1999 and prior to joining Hicks I was a partner in the labour and employment group at a firm which recently merged with an international firm.

### **What brought about the move to Hicks Morley?**

I really wanted to concentrate more of my time on my core area of practice – labour and employment – because that’s what I love to do. And it was becoming more difficult to do in an international partnership, because there were a lot of administrative responsibilities that took me away from my practice.

So the move to Hicks Morley was a great one for me. And I was fortunate to have all of my clients follow me over, so there was continuity for both them and me.

I knew I was in the right place when I went to my first professional development day here. I’ve never experienced that type of internal legal education. The depth of knowledge was phenomenal – and I learned from every speaker.

### **In what main areas do you work?**

When you’re part of the labour and employment group at a management-side firm, you do it all, so I have a very broad practice. And I really enjoy the variety – my days are never the same. The two largest industries I work in are automotive and construction, and my work ranges across many areas, from collective bargaining, to arbitrations, to human rights, to occupational health and safety. I especially enjoy the advocacy work, whether at a tribunal or in court.

### **What are the trends you’re seeing in the area?**

Since mandatory retirement laws were abolished, the issues involving older workers are growing. For example, in the construction industry, you have trades people – such as brick layers or crane operators – who have hit their mid-60s and may be slowing down and not as productive. The employee wants to keep working, but there are performance issues. If you let them go, is that age discrimination? It’s a difficult issue to address, and we’re called upon to find solutions on a regular basis because it impacts every industry sector.

It makes it more critical for employers to manage performance issues throughout an employee’s career, especially because you don’t want age to become an issue in any assertion of a valid performance concern.

**When you’re part of the labour and employment group at a management-side firm, you do it all...**

### **How about your life outside of law – what are your main interests?**

My wife and I live in Toronto, and have two children, a 21-year-old daughter and a 17-year-old son. With my son off to McGill this Fall, this is the first time in 13 years that I haven’t been coaching hockey. So I’ve laced up the skates and am finally getting back to playing the game myself.

We’ve also done a lot of travelling as a family, and that will continue to be a focus. This includes travelling down to see the Blue Jays in Spring training for the past three years, so needless to say this past baseball season has been a very exciting one for all of us!

# NEW ASSOCIATES

Hicks Morley is pleased to welcome back the following new associates to the Toronto office, after the successful completion of their articles at the firm and their call to the Bar in 2015.



## LYDIA J. BAY

Lydia Bay currently practises in all areas of labour and employment law. Lydia provides advice and representation to employers and management in both the public and private sectors on a wide range of labour and employment issues. Lydia received her joint Masters of Industrial Relations and Juris Doctor degree from Queen's University. Prior to law school, Lydia graduated with distinction from the University of Guelph with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, specializing in Human Resources Management. Lydia both summered and articulated at the firm.

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## NJERI DAMALI CAMPBELL

Njeri Damali Campbell is a lawyer practising labour and employment law. She advises and represents private and public sector employers on a wide range of issues, including human rights, grievance arbitrations, wrongful dismissals, employment standards, employment contracts and related court litigation.

Experienced in human rights investigations, training and compliance in the College sector, Njeri also provides a number of training seminars for clients. Njeri received a Juris Doctor from Osgoode Hall Law School, and a Masters in Education and a Bachelors of Arts in Political Science and Sociology from York University. Njeri articulated with the firm.

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### **ALYSON M. FRANKIE**

Alyson Frankie is a lawyer in the Pension, Benefits and Executive Compensation practice group. Alyson provides advice on various aspects of pension and benefit plans, including plan governance and administration, plan mergers and wind-ups and corporate transactions. Alyson is a graduate of the Faculty of Law at Queen's University, where she also completed a Master of Industrial Relations degree.

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### **ELIZABETH D. WINTER**

Elizabeth Winter currently practises in all areas of labour and employment law. She provides advice and representation to employers and management in both the public and private sectors on a wide range of issues. Elizabeth obtained her Juris Doctor from the University of Toronto in 2014. Prior to law school, Elizabeth obtained a Masters of Science in Comparative Social Policy from the University of Oxford. Elizabeth both summered and articulated at the firm before returning in 2015.

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**Hicks Morley is also pleased to welcome the following new associates to the firm.**



### **GABRIELLE FORTIER-COFSKY**

Gabrielle Fortier-Cofsky is a lawyer at the Hicks Morley Ottawa office. She is a member of the firm's Pension, Benefits and Executive Compensation practice group, where she provides advice on private and public pension plans in both the provincial and federal sectors. She also practises in all areas of labour and employment law, concentrating on French practice in these areas. Throughout her studies, she worked in pension policy for federally regulated pension plans. Prior to joining the firm, Gabrielle articulated in a medium-size firm in Montréal, and clerked at the Federal Court of Appeal.

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### **PAUL A. MIGICOVSKY**

Paul Migicovsky is a lawyer at the Hicks Morley Toronto office, and currently practises in the firm's Pension, Benefits and Executive Compensation practice group.

While in law school at the University of Western Ontario, Paul was an editor with the Canada-United States Law Journal. Prior to joining the firm, he articulated with the Financial Services Commission of Ontario and was a summer law student at OMERS Administration Corporation.

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### **CAREY O'CONNOR**

Carey O'Connor is a lawyer at the Hicks Morley Toronto office and currently practises in all areas of labour and employment law. She provides advice and representation to both private and public sector employers and management on a wide range of labour and employment issues.

Carey's background is in complex commercial litigation, as well as employment and benefits matters. She has particular expertise litigating employment matters in both the financial services and technology sectors.

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### **JEFFREY A. PATTERSON**

Jeffrey Patterson is a lawyer at the Hicks Morley Toronto office. Jeffrey practises in all areas of labour and employment law and has represented clients before administrative tribunals and the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. He provides both public and private sector clients with practical advice and representation on matters relating to wrongful dismissal, grievance arbitrations, interest arbitrations, collective bargaining, employment standards, employment contracts, human rights and related court litigation.

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