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Honourable Diane Finley, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
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July 3rd, 2012

Dear Minister,

On behalf of Merit Canada and its 3,500 members, I would like to raise an important matter regarding the Employment Insurance system with you.

Under the current regulations, Employment Insurance recipients are required to seek suitable employment. However, the rules let individuals on union hiring hall lists to be deemed "actively seeking" because they are on the union's out of work list, and there is no requirement that they actually seek any other employment. Even though there are construction jobs available, as long as they are on the union's list, they do not have to accept any other employment.

This was confirmed by Christopher Smillie, spokesperson for the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, Canadian Office, who said:

"Union members have different rules that apply to them as far as eligibility. We have inquired with the minister's office and are waiting to find out what impact this will have on hiring halls across the country." **According to Smillie, union members are currently exempt from showing they are looking for work, because the hiring hall is responsible for finding them employment.** (<http://www.afl.org/index.php/AFL-in-the-News/industry-uncertain-about-impact-of-ei-reform.html>, June 6, 2012)

As I'm sure you can appreciate, Merit Canada and its members are extremely concerned about such a double standard being part of the Employment Insurance system. It creates a two tier system, with privileged union members not having to meet the same requirements to actively seek employment as other unemployed workers. It means that all other workers have to subsidize union members, who merely put their name on a list and wait, while continuing to collect Employment Insurance. As I'm sure you will agree, this is blatantly unfair to all other workers and stands against the principles of your reforms to the system.

As you move forward with your effort to reform the Employment Insurance system, we hope you will be able to address this area of concern as well.

I will be contacting a member of your staff to follow up on this important issue for our members.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Terrance Oakey
President
Merit Canada

