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## The Value of Unions in our Society

Unions are an essential aspect of the lives of many workers across the globe. However, at the same time, many individuals remain uncertain about unions and their purpose. In Canada especially, it is imperative that all workers understand the purpose of unions, are educated about their rights as unionized workers, and learn about ways to get involved in their own health and safety. Unions can be described as organizations that unite and cohere workers, while also creating a work environment where all members feel secure. Unions help support workers and advocate for their rights within the workplace. There are countless benefits to working within a union, including increased equality, democracy among workers, and vast worker benefits.

Firstly, unions are critical to promoting and ensuring a work environment that is inclusive and free from harmful discrimination. To begin, unions have had notable contributions to women's rights within the workforce. Unions have made efforts to encourage the implementation of stable and consistent scheduling, fair and equal pay for female workers, and many benefits. For instance, women working within unions are more likely to receive high wages and fair maternity leave time than ununionized workers. As a woman working within a union myself, I can confidently state that my union has been of great support in encouraging me and my rights, especially within a male-dominated job. Overall, unions make it possible to envision a future where the gender pay gap closes and where women can work and live a balanced life! In addition, unions are essential in promoting inclusivity and equality, as they have a personal responsibility to respond to and act against discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Unions promote equality, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all of their workers, regardless of sex, age, gender, religion, political beliefs, education, disabilities, and many more. Unions are committed to open communication and consideration regarding policies and procedures that help fight inequality and discrimination. Unions also provide education to workers on their overall human rights as well as their rights within the workplace. This education will teach workers how to spot harassment or discrimination at work and how to report it. All of these guidelines ensure that all individuals receive equal opportunities, advantages, and pay. All in all, unions are required to treat all workers fairly and equally, while continually working towards improving workplace conditions and equality.

Secondly, unions support and encourage democracy among the workers in their workplaces. The decisions of a democracy wholly depend on the people it serves! Within a democracy, individuals have the right to have a voice and an impact on the future of the organization. Workers within a union have the right to vote for individuals who will be making decisions that will affect the workers within a union. A worker can vote for their union, elect a workplace representative, or on a collective agreement. Workers also have the right to sign or refrain from signing an authorization card which signifies that they wish to be represented by the union. Workers in good standing are also permitted to attend local union meetings to stay informed and involved. One can clearly see the care that unions demonstrate in ensuring that workers are well-represented and accurately spoken for. Evidently, all of these rights give workers a voice to advocate for the health, safety and equality of not only themselves but all workers within the union.

Lastly, unions provide workers with vast and very valuable benefits which support them in living a balanced life. Unions invest in the health and well-being of all its workers through valuable benefits including, but not limited to, pensions, dental and medical care, vacation time, maternity leave, job protection and security, higher wages, and stable working hours. To be more specific, my father's employment with Jason Rouillard Logging has allowed him to greatly profit from the benefits provided by the United Steelworkers.

My family and I do not have to worry about the financial strain of dental costs, as the majority of those costs are covered by his union. In addition, as a union worker myself, I was greatly supported by my union, as they helped cover a large portion of the costs for my steel-toe boots and rain gear. These two items, along with many other forms of personal protective gear, have helped me feel safe and comfortable while learning new skills at work. All of these factors help promote a positive and safe work environment, whether that be regarding the physical condition of the workplace or the mental and emotional health of the workers.

In conclusion, it is apparent that unions are an important part of many individuals' lives. In our society, unions are valuable to help create a work environment that is equal and inclusive, promote and advocate for democracy among workers, and finally provide workers with many essential benefits. Unions are establishing the grounds for a future of fair, prosperous, and safe workplaces here in our city and also across the world. Unions help workers feel safe and confident every single day they go to work.