

Bill 56

The Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Amendment Act

October 2026



The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is the province's central labour body, made up of more than thirty (30) affiliated unions representing 130,000 unionized workers from the public sector, private sector, and building trades. Workplace health and safety is a key priority for the MFL and our affiliated unions.

The MFL conducts health and safety research, provides health and safety education and training to our members, and lobbies and advocates for stronger laws, stricter enforcement, and greater investment in injury and illness prevention to keep all workers safe and healthy.

Every worker has the right to a safe and healthy workplace, and every family has the right to expect that their loved ones will return home safely at the end of every workday.

Workplace injuries and illnesses are preventable. When we have the right laws, enforcement strategies, and prevention programs, we can ensure that all workers stay safe and healthy on the job.

While employers have the legal duty to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, it is also true that the laws that governments pass, the policies they implement, and the investments they make have a major influence on our workplace health and safety system.

While many improvements to workplace health and safety have been won by workers and unions over the course of many decades of fighting for worker safety, there is clearly a lot of work to be done.

Manitoba's time loss injury rate, which measure injuries that are serious enough to cause workers to miss time from work, was 2.5 injuries per 100 workers in 2025. That's the worst rate in the country. Manitoba's rate is 25 per cent higher than any other province and over 60 per cent higher than the Canadian average. It was also the third year in a row we have had the country's highest injury rate.

Moreover, the Workers Compensation Board is making no progress on reducing injuries. When the provincial government was in charge of injury prevention, they brought the injury rate down by 45%. But after some initial modest progress, the WCB has failed to improve Manitoba's injury rate over what it was in 2019—they've made no improvement whatsoever in six years.

That is why the MFL has recently called for an independent review of the WCB's prevention regime, including the system under which prevention has been largely devolved to employer associations. It's time that we shine a light on WCB and get to the bottom of why their program is not producing results. Workers deserve better. Employers deserve better. And we all deserve answers.

If WCB can't get the job done, then they shouldn't be in charge.

With respect to cannabis, we do want to commend the government on these proposed amendments to the Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Control Act, which would remove the requirement for cannabis stores to have window coverings and allow for the establishment of minimum staffing levels in these stores.

As part of a recent study by the MFL on workplace violence in Manitoba, cannabis store workers told us that covered windows and working alone are two factors that leave them particularly vulnerable to violence.

Sadly, we are all too familiar with the reports of serious violence against these workers.

Just a few months ago, in May of this year, a female cannabis store employee, who was working alone, was sexually assaulted. This took place behind covered windows where no one could even see what was transpiring.

Less than a year ago, in the course of about one month, there were two armed robberies of cannabis stores in which workers were held at gunpoint.

These are just a couple of examples of the level of violent hazards these workers face.

The changes proposed in Bill 56 are an important step in helping address this urgent issue.

I would like to also recognize the important work that UFCW Local 832 has done in driving the changes proposed in this bill. Through an extensive survey of cannabis workers, which included UFCW members as well as non-unionized cannabis workers, UFCW 832 has put together a very clear picture of worker needs. And through effective campaigning, Local 832 has been instrumental in drawing attention to the hazards that cannabis store workers face and in calling for measures to address those hazards.

With the introduction of Bill 56, it is our hope that government will now take the next steps and legislate the other important changes that UFCW Local 832 has been calling for: mandated closing times, alarm systems for workers to summon assistance, and controlled entrances such as those that have worked so well in addressing violence at Liquor Marts.

We also call on government to take urgent, concrete action to address the growing epidemic of violence that is affecting so many of our workers and workplaces.

The MFL study I mentioned earlier found that there were close to 2,200 workplace violence injuries in Manitoba last year. Not only is this level of workplace violence alarmingly high, but it has also been increasing for a long time. In fact, the number of injuries caused by workplace violence in Manitoba more than tripled between 2015 and 2025. This increase includes a 20% jump in workplace violence injuries in just the last two years.

This violence is happening across a wide range of sectors, both public and private: retail (including cannabis stores); health care; transit; security; education; fire and paramedic services; social services; corrections; homecare; long-term care—pretty much anywhere workers interact with the public.

Based on our research and on interviews with many workers across these sectors, the MFL has made a number of recommendations to government to help curb the growing trend of workplace violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Implement a provincial workplace violence prevention strategy

Over the last decade, the number of violent workplace injuries has tripled in Manitoba, but SAFE Work Manitoba, the WCB's prevention arm, has yet to develop a prevention strategy targeted at reducing workplace violence. This is a major gap in Manitoba's current prevention programming. Violent injuries need urgent attention, and a comprehensive provincial strategy should be developed in partnership with labour and rolled out to support employer responsibility, education, violence hazard identification, elimination and mitigation, and changing the current workplace culture of acceptance and worker-blaming.

Recommendation 2: Fund safe staffing levels

While the provincial government has taken some important steps to reverse the staffing declines that resulted from public service cuts under the previous government, staffing shortages remain very serious in healthcare, emergency response, education, corrections and many other vital public services. Staffing shortages are not just compromising public service quality, access and timeliness, but it is clear from this report that they are also creating dangerous working conditions in which workers are being exposed to workplace violence and suffering high and increasing rates of violent workplace injuries. The overwhelming majority of occupations experiencing the highest rates of violent workplace injuries in Manitoba are in the public sector. Workers interviewed for this project universally identified safer staffing levels as foundational to turn the tide on workplace violence—both in terms of creating working environments where violence is less likely to occur and workplaces better equipped to respond to violence.

Recommendation 3: Ensure safe facilities to deal with workplace violence / address overcrowding

Relatedly, another common theme of this report is the need to have appropriate physical spaces to deal with violence when it happens in a workplace, such as a safe and properly staffed location in an Emergency Room to receive violent patients being brought in by police, safe spaces in schools to respond to violence, dedicated safe areas to deal with violence in correctional institutions, etc. Several workers interviewed

for this project spoke about a lack of appropriate physical space (and lack of safe staffing) as worsening worker exposure to violence on the job. And, of course, it's easy to understand how long waits in hospitals, packed classrooms, overcrowded jails, etc., not only make it more difficult for workers to deal with violence, but also greatly elevate the risk of violence in the workplace. Greater public investment is needed to ensure public facilities (and staffing levels) can safely accommodate the volume of people they need to accommodate.

Recommendation 4: Ensure security personnel are highly trained to help protect workplaces experiencing high rates of violence

As noted in this report, particularly in healthcare, there are calls for highly trained security personnel to be put in place to deal with exceptionally high rates of workplace violence. Security personnel should receive high-quality training including in de-escalation, trauma-informed practices, cultural safety and awareness, dealing with mental health and substance use, and medical first aid. These jobs require skilled workers and re-establishing the Security Guard Minimum Wage could help attract, support and retain workers who perform these important roles.

Recommendation 5: Enforce the existing legal requirement for employers to train workers on workplace violence hazards and develop a formal training standard on workplace violence

It is a core responsibility of all employers under Manitoba's Workplace Safety & Health Act and Regulations to train workers on any workplace hazards, including hazards related to workplace violence. Many workers who shared their experiences as part of this project spoke about the need for better training to assist them in dealing with violent situations, including de-escalation techniques.

It is further recommended that the Manitoba Safety & Health Training Standards Council be mandated to develop a formal and mandatory standard for training on workplace violence to ensure high-quality training throughout Manitoba workplaces. The Council's mandate is to develop training standards on high impact hazards, and it is clear that workplace violence meets that test.

Recommendation 6: Enforce the existing legal requirement for all workplaces to carry out a violence hazard assessment, and ensure that employers with identified violence hazards develop and follow appropriate violence prevention policies

Manitoba is not doing enough to enforce its own Workplace Violence Regulation, and workers are paying the price. While the Regulation requires that all workplaces undertake a workplace violence hazard assessment, there is no evidence that the Province of Manitoba has ever undertaken a focused enforcement campaign in this area to determine the state of compliance. If violence hazards are not assessed, it goes without saying that they will not be addressed.

Additionally, workers have reported that many workplaces mandated by the Workplace Violence Regulation to have a violence prevention policy in place are not following these policies (frequently related to understaffing). The Workplace Safety & Health Branch should be resourced and mandated to dramatically step up enforcement around workplace violence policies and hazard mitigation. A 40% increase in workplace violence injuries over the last two years cries out for dedicated enforcement to curb the epidemic of violence.

Recommendation 7: Enforce the existing legal requirement for workplaces to have a functioning Joint Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Committee / Provide Unions with Committee records

Joint WSH Committees are vital to the effective functioning of a workplace safety and health management system, including through recognizing and addressing violent hazards. Joint WSH Committees have a mandated role in risk assessments, incident investigations, and ensuring corrective actions are taken to prevent recurrences. Many workers reported that their Joint WSH Committees are not meeting their responsibilities and lack the required information and support from Management to perform their duties.

As an indication of how bad the situation has become in healthcare, MAHCP has resorted to filing legal action with the Court of King's Bench to compel Shared Health (the employer) to meet its obligations under the *Workplace Safety and Health Act* and Regulations with respect to the requirement to have functioning Joint WSH Committees, to ensure health and safety representatives are adequately trained, and that violent incidents are properly reported, investigated and followed up with improvement actions.

The WSH Branch should undertake a targeted enforcement campaign to ensure employers have properly functioning Joint WSH Committees. Government should also re-instate the previous requirement (cut by the Pallister government) to file Joint WSH Committee Minutes with the Branch to improve tracking and enforcement in this area.

The Workplace Violence Regulation should also be amended to make explicit the right of Joint WSH Committees to receive at every meeting information on all workplace violent incidents, and the corrective actions that have been taken or remain outstanding by the employer in response.

Employers should also be required to provide unions with records of all Joint WSH Committee materials, including but not limited to minutes and incident reports.

Recommendation 8: Enforce the existing legal requirement for all employers who require employees to work alone to do so under the terms of appropriate Working Alone Procedures

It is well established that working alone presents additional hazards related to workplace violence, and many of the worker participants we spoke to stress this point.

Additional enforcement resources should be employed to make sure employers have working alone procedures, to make sure these procedures are informed and appropriate to workplace violence hazards, and that employers have the staff and other measures in place to abide by their own working alone procedures.

Serious consideration should be given to banning working alone in sectors experiencing high rates of workplace violence.

Recommendation 9: Require effective communication systems at work to better prevent and respond to violence

Workers in many different types of workplaces identified poor communication systems as interfering with their ability to alert co-workers to violence or the possibility of violence and to call for help, for themselves or for others. Effective communication systems should be a mandated component of workplace violence prevention policies. While good communication is a universal concern in preventing and dealing with workplace violence, there are additional considerations in rural and northern settings where workers may not even have the benefit of cell phone services. Unreliable cell phone service often puts workers in a position where they are forced to work outside the terms of their employer's working alone procedures.

Recommendation 10: Ensure workers have available information about potentially violent environments, and that corresponding mitigation measures are taken

Many workers who participated in this project identified that their employers and/or police have vital information about people or locations with high probabilities of violence, and that this information is not shared with workers who have to interact with these people and places in advance. This is totally unacceptable. Workers should never be sent into known potentially violent situations without having available information and being provided with every appropriate hazard reduction measure. Protocols need to be developed to ensure information sharing between institutions, facilities, and police.

In the case of public institutions, like schools and personal care homes for example, communication protocols should also be developed to improve understanding and interaction with the families of violent patients, students, etc., so that families understand what's happening and the protocols needed to keep everyone safe.

In closing, the MFL urges that Bill 56 be passed quickly. Cannabis store workers urgently need these protections. We also urge that government move quickly to implement the other protections UFCW Local 832 has been calling for.

Finally, the MFL calls on the government to take additional actions, including those recommended in our recent report, to address the growing epidemic of violence in Manitoba workplaces.