



Tel: 604-273-5722 | **Fax:** 604-273-5762 | **Toll Free:** 1-866-273-5766 | **Toll Free Fax:** 1-866-273-5762
105 - 21900 Westminster Hwy., Richmond, BC V6V 0A8
info@apbc.ca | info@911bc.com | www.apbc.ca | www.911bc.com

June 18, 2020

Dear Members;

Re: Member Update Concerning the EDBC Executive's Motion to Separate

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion on the topic of the Emergency Dispatchers of BC, CUPE Local 873-02 (EDBC) separating from the Ambulance Paramedics of BC, CUPE Local 873 (APBC). The EDBC executive will be seeking a mandate from its members in the near future on the issue of separating from APBC.

We are disappointed that the current EDBC leadership is giving its members such short notice of a motion to end a 25-year relationship with the APBC. We are even more disappointed that the current EDBC leadership did not first try to address any issues it may have directly with the APBC. However, if the majority of the bargaining unit at E-COMM votes to separate in accordance with the CUPE Constitution, we will of course respect their wishes in this regard.

However, before this very important decision is made, we believe all members of the APBC should have all the facts.

Here are some questions and answers for all members to consider.

What is the membership of the APBC?

The total membership of the APBC today is approximately 5000 members providing public safety and frontline health services throughout British Columbia. This includes approximately 4500 members employed by the BC Ambulance Service, some 400 of whom are emergency dispatchers. It also includes over 500 emergency dispatchers employed by E-COMM, who constitute just over 10% of the total membership.

How did the EDBC become part of the APBC?

The EDBC became part of the APBC in 1995, when E-COMM was established. The majority of the initial employee complement came from Vancouver Police Dispatch. These employees had originally been represented by the VMREU (now CUPE Local 15), the municipal union that represented City employees. Dissatisfied with being part of a union where public safety workers were a very small minority of the membership, the employees switched to representation by Teamsters Local 31 where they had their own unit, but the dissatisfaction continued.

When it came time for a representation vote at the new E-COMM operation, the employees overwhelmingly chose to join the APBC because both groups were composed entirely of public safety workers. The APBC understood the concerns of public safety workers in general, and emergency dispatchers in particular, as a result of the composition of its own membership. The APBC provided

considerable support to its new sub-local as it became established and grew, drawing on its own existing resources to do so in a spirit of solidarity. This relationship has endured for the past 25 years, and in our view has been mutually beneficial.

What is the structure of the APBC?

The structure of the APBC is set out in Ambulance Paramedics and Emergency Dispatchers of B.C. 2019 Bylaws (the “Bylaws”), which are publicly available to all members on both the APBC website at <https://bit.ly/30SBS9w> and the EDBC website at <https://tinyurl.com/y987yej6>. These Bylaws date back to 1963 when the APBC was first formed as a local union of CUPE. The Bylaws have been democratically amended over the years as the APBC has grown and evolved. The amendments included adding specific provisions concerning the EDBC when it joined the APBC in 1995, to give the EDBC membership a strong role in the organization. As the EDBC membership has grown, the Bylaws have continued to be amended to reflect this growing membership.

The emergency dispatchers employed by E-COMM have their own sub-local under the Bylaws. The sub-local enjoys considerable autonomy, subject to the overall governance structure of the APBC. As a democratic body, the ultimate governing body of the APBC is the general membership through the Annual Convention and Special Conventions. The convention delegates represent the entire membership of the APBC, including the membership of the EDBC.

Between Conventions, the Provincial Executive Board (the “PEB”) is the governing body of the APBC. The PEB is composed of 29 elected positions. Under the Bylaws, a minimum of 3 of these positions are reserved for EDBC members (the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Grievance Officer). This guarantees the EDBC strong representation on the PEB commensurate with its proportion of the overall membership. In addition, members of the EDBC are eligible for additional positions on the PEB, giving EDBC members additional opportunity for participation in the overall direction of the APBC.

Between meetings of the Provincial Executive Board, the Provincial Executive Committee (the “PEC”) is the governing body of the APBC. The PEC is composed of 7 individuals. Under the Bylaws, one of these positions is reserved for an EDBC member (the Chairperson). This again guarantees the EDBC representation commensurate with its proportion of the overall membership. As with the PEB, members of the EDBC are also eligible for additional positions on the PEC, again giving EDBC members additional opportunity for participation in the overall direction of the APBC.

Does the EDBC Chairperson, Executive, or Bargaining Committee have complete autonomy under the Bylaws?

No, the EDBC Chairperson, Executive, and Bargaining Committee do not have complete autonomy under the Bylaws. Nor does the APBC President, the APBC Provincial Executive Committee, or the APBC Bargaining Committee. All of these positions are subject to checks and balances under the democratic structures of the Bylaws.

Can the current structure set out in the Bylaws be changed?

Yes, the current structure set out in the Bylaws can be changed. The Bylaws have been amended on various occasions, including amendments that have increased the role of the EDBC within the APBC. Like the Bylaws of any CUPE local, amendments have to be democratically approved by the general membership, and by the General President of CUPE.

Have there been any recent proposals to amend the Bylaws to provide greater autonomy for the EDBC?

No. The most recent proposal was to add an additional EDBC representative on the PEB in 2017, to reflect the increasing membership at E-COMM. This proposal was duly approved by the general membership and the General President of CUPE and is now reflected in the Bylaws.

Why is the current EDBC leadership putting forward a motion to separate from the APBC now and with only one week's notice?

This is a question you would have to ask the current EDBC leadership. On April 30, 2020 the newly elected EDBC Chairperson advised the APBC President that separation was not on his agenda (despite the fact that the Chairperson had voiced support for separation during his election campaign). Taking him at his word, the APBC was looking forward to working with the new EDBC Chairperson, and was surprised when he almost immediately turned around and began pursuing separation. The APBC would have expected an attempt to resolve any concerns directly, rather than immediately moving to sever a 25-year relationship. The APBC would also have expected the membership to be given more time to properly consider such an important decision under the CUPE Constitution.

The origin of the desire to separate appears to relate to the last round of EDBC collective bargaining. In November of 2019 the EDBC Bargaining Committee asked the APBC President to immediately commit to the APBC providing half of **\$193,685** for a public relations cost share campaign, to convince municipalities to increase their funding of E-COMM. The APBC President declined the request, pointing out that he did not have the authority or the budget to do so. For certain individuals, this appears to have been an unacceptable fetter on their desired autonomy.

It should also be noted that during this round of bargaining the APBC had already entered into a cost-share advertising campaign with CUPE National to assist the EDBC, with the total spent being over \$48,000. In addition, during this same round of bargaining the APBC provided almost \$20,000 out of its legal budget for legal representation for the EDBC at the Labour Relations Board. These Labour Relations Board proceedings resulted in the EDBC successfully obtaining access to interest arbitration, which had been a longstanding goal of the Bargaining Committee.

Why didn't the APBC initially agree to mediate terms of separation two weeks ago?

On June 2, 2020 the APBC was requested by CUPE National to mediate the terms of separation with the leadership of the EDBC. The APBC initially declined this proposal because the CUPE National Constitution requires a membership vote prior to any group separating, and the APBC believed it would be profoundly undemocratic to ignore this step and do some sort of "backroom" separation prior to a vote being held. Notwithstanding, the APBC did acknowledge that it was willing to hear any issues and work with the leadership of EDBC to collaboratively address and resolve any concerns they may have surrounding their identified categories of Autonomy, Bureaucracy and Inclusion. The APBC further acknowledged it could look at utilizing a third party to assist with resolution.

What are the benefits of belonging to the APBC?

The APBC is one of the founding locals of CUPE, with a proud history of advocating for public safety workers for almost 60 years. For the past 25 years, the EDBC has been an integral part of the APBC.

The APBC is one of the largest CUPE locals in the nation. As a result, it has built up considerable experience and expertise. This experience and expertise is reflected in the fact that many of its members have gone on to prominent roles within CUPE National (including the last two BC Regional Directors of CUPE and a large number of CUPE National Representatives).

Collectively, the current members of the APBC Provincial Executive Committee have many decades of full time labour relations experience. This experience is a resource that is available for the benefit of all members of the APBC, including members of the EDBC. Because of our size and resources, we are able to provide many services and benefits that smaller locals are simply not in a position to provide. These include the following:

1. Skilled and experienced representatives to assist members in arbitrations and other legal proceedings.
2. Skilled and experienced representatives to assist in collective bargaining.
3. A legal budget to provide access to legal counsel for important cases in relation to both the Ambulance Service and E-COMM. For example, in addition to the \$20,000 for legal representation for the EDBC during its last round of bargaining, the APBC also spent over \$20,000 for legal representation in Labour Relations Board proceedings to ensure that employees at the South Island Dispatch Centre were represented by the EDBC.
4. A robust and public safety focused Critical Incident Stress Management program.
5. A dedicated Health & Wellness Director to provide guidance on issues such as WSBC, LTD, etc.
6. The ability to implement sophisticated social media and public education campaigns.
7. Qualified and experienced full-time administrative support personnel.
8. A large office with meeting and training space.
9. An annual Convention with a range of notable speakers and a retirement dinner for all retiring members.
10. Well established political connections with all levels of government.
11. A wide variety of training programs.

12. Participation in various external conferences such as the UBCM and the APCO.
13. A substantial strike fund.
14. A Ceremonial Unit available for a variety of events.
15. A significant death benefit for all members.

There is no CUPE local in British Columbia with 500 members that can provide this level of services and benefits. Indeed, a local with 500 members would be very hard pressed to have one full-time officer and a staffed office. That is why CUPE National has been encouraging the merger of smaller locals (see e.g. the report of the *CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer's Task Force on Staffing*, September 2018).

Some questions to ask yourself

At the end of the day, only the members of the EDBC can decide whether they wish to separate. The APBC will respect the collective decision of the EDBC membership in accordance with the CUPE Constitution. However, this is a very important question that should be considered very carefully. Here are some questions members may wish to ask themselves:

1. Why is the present EDBC leadership only giving one week's notice of a motion on such an important issue?
2. How will a small stand-alone local of just over 500 members provide the same level of services and benefits as the APBC?
3. Why is separation being proposed at a time when CUPE National is encouraging the merger of local unions to provide more effective representation?
4. Is now the right time to be separating, when the municipalities that fund E-COMM are experiencing a huge drop in revenue and massive layoffs?
5. Why has no attempt been made to identify specific issues with the existing structure, and why has no attempt been made to resolve any specific issues that may exist?
6. Finally, is this separation actually being driven by a demonstrated need for a more autonomous structure, or is it really a question of personalities and politics?

Conclusion

The APBC does not believe that the EDBC needs to separate to achieve progress. In fact, we believe we are stronger together and can achieve greater change when united. We don't need to look far to see the power of collaboration and the strength of our organization as a whole. This past year we saw how advocacy coupled with a strong display of diplomacy can affect change at the highest level when the Provincial Government amended Bill 9 (the Workers Compensation Act, 2018) to include Emergency Dispatchers in the presumptive legislation for operational stress injuries. CUPE 873's Executive Political Liaison, Health and Wellness Director and CISM Chair, along with the EDBC Chairperson and the APBC President, were able to capitalize on a long history of relationship building with key stakeholders to ensure that

Emergency Dispatchers received the recognition they deserved for the services they provide and receive the appropriate resources they need when that work takes a toll on their mental well-being.

The above is just one example of how the experience and breadth of knowledge available through the APBC serves to benefit and empower the entire membership, including the membership of the EDBC.

The APBC Executive has struggled to obtain the specifics from the current EDBC Executive with regard to their underlying concerns. While we have heard that “Bureaucracy, Inclusion and Autonomy” of the sub-local are of top concern, we have not received any details beyond that which would allow us to constructively address any organizational and operational concerns.

It is important to note that the Bylaws that govern the EDBC as a sub-local are in fact the same bylaws that govern the entire APBC. All members and union officials have the same burden of expectation placed upon them regardless of their title or the position they hold. Accountability is a cornerstone of unionism as our mandate exists for the sole benefit of the members who fund the organization through their dues. It is our hope that the burden of accountability has not been misinterpreted as a lack of autonomy. Structure exists within a union to ensure a *balance* of power. As such, the power lies within each and every member to have a say and effect change. Many mechanisms exist to promote, embrace and harness the power of our members, including the ability to submit resolutions to change our bylaws and policies. No decision within our local is made unilaterally – to do so would not only be unconstitutional but would not allow for the constructive processes that enable us work collectively towards our goals.

No relationship is perfect, and there is always room for improvement – to think otherwise is arrogance. The APBC will always strive to do better, to be better, and to achieve more for our members. We remain ready and committed to put in the work to best serve the members of the EDBC.

When we welcomed the Emergency Dispatchers of BC into APBC, we did so for a reason: we believe that we are much stronger together and have a common bond of Public Safety. Soon the EDBC will be asked to make the most important decision in the history of the local and we implore them to vote based on history, facts and what is in the best interest of the collective.

I and the PEC remain available to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

In solidarity,



Troy Clifford
Provincial President
Ambulance Paramedics & Emergency Dispatchers of BC
CUPE Local 873/873-02

TC/sd/MoveUp