

Date: June 3, 2025
To: Annette Toth, President COPE/SEPB
Re: Solidarity Statement - COPE National Convention
From: COPE Local 343, 491, 225, 521, 103, 429, 468 and 523



COPE Local 343, 491, 225, 521, 103, 429, 468 and 523 stand in solidarity with Manitoba residents and First Nations leaders in calling on all levels of government to free up hotel space immediately and provide temporary housing for evacuees displaced by wildfires.

In a state of emergency, it is our belief that as labour leaders, activists, and allies, it is our duty to respond promptly and adequately to calls within the community. In a [statement](#) that was put out on May 31st, First Nations leaders in Manitoba requested the aforementioned support, as well as urging the suspension of any and all conferences to free up hotel space and air travel for evacuees. With our COPE/SEPB National Convention taking place in Manitoba during this time of distress, it is our belief that our attendance at such an event would be grossly inappropriate, as well as a contravention of the values we preach. In fact, to continue with such an event is a disservice to our collective struggle for justice.

In labour, we begin every event with a land acknowledgment in which we recognize our presence as settlers and affirm our responsibility to protecting this land and to the Indigenous peoples from whom this land was taken. It is our view that by ignoring these urgent calls from the First Nations community, we are only perpetuating a vicious cycle of settler colonialism which continues to put Indigenous peoples in harm's way and devalues their livelihood and wellbeing. Our attendance at a Convention is not worth more than the human lives at risk. We cannot sit idly by as communities are in disarray, and in the same breath, call ourselves champions of equity and human rights. Equity is not a check box. Solidarity is not just a word. It is acting, even when that action may not be convenient or easy.

Beyond the implications our presence would inflict on the Manitoba community, COPE/SEPB National has a duty to accommodate members living with a disability who would be barred from attending an event in these conditions, furthering our concerns that equity and equitable access is not being considered. This poses a health and safety risk for our members, and leaving the decision to attend up to the individuals puts members in a compromising position.

This isn't a matter of 'if' the COPE/SEPB National Convention should continue. This is a matter of 'why'. Why are we prioritizing an event over the safety and request of the community? Why do we call for solidarity if we do not show it in moments when it matters most? Why do we do the work we do, if not to uplift the voices of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups? Why not do everything in our power to protect and preserve the greater good?

We call upon our fellow labour communities to respond with the same level of urgency and concern and ask for assistance in amplifying this sentiment and the request from the First Nations leaders. We call on COPE/SEPB National to adequately address these concerns and reflect on our commitment to equity and to each other. We are deeply disappointed with the lack of action. We need to do better.

In solidarity and struggle,

Local 343 Local 491, Local 225, Local 521, Local 103, Local 429, Local 468, Local 523

Copy: COPE / SEPB National Executive Board, COPE/SEPB Ontario Executive Board, COPE/SEPB Ontario Locals,
COPE / SEPB Canadian Equity Council