

From: Eve Goldberg <eve@evegoldberg.com>
Subject: Canada Emergency Response Benefit and Impact on Freelance/Independent Arts Workers
Date: March 30, 2020 at 12:16:56 PM EDT
To: Bill.Morneau@parl.gc.ca
Cc: justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca, Carla.Qualtrough@parl.gc.ca, Steven.Guilbeault@parl.gc.ca, Filomena.Tassi@parl.gc.ca, Arif.Virani@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Morneau,

I am writing to you as President of AFM Local 1000, the travelling musicians' local of the American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (I am copying my MP, Arif Virani as well as other ministers whose portfolios touch on the issues at hand). Local 1000 serves almost 500 independent touring folk and acoustic musicians from all across Canada and the U.S. We currently have about 185 Canadian members.

I am extremely concerned about the eligibility criteria that have been circulated so far for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit; namely, the requirement that an individual have had at least 14 consecutive days with \$0 of income.

I believe this rule reflects a poor understanding of how those who work in precarious industries earn their income, and will result in disqualifying exactly those workers the benefit is meant to help.

I will speak specifically to the situation of independent musicians, since that is the reality that I know and can speak to personally, however, I believe the same reality applies to the vast majority of independent arts workers, and probably to most other corners of the gig economy.

Independent musicians are vulnerable workers who are mostly self-employed with little or no access to benefits such as sick leave, employment insurance, or extended health benefits. They often act as their own booking agent, manager, publicist, graphic designer, web designer, social media director, travel agent, bookkeeper, road manager, and roadie in addition to creating music and performing. Most cobble together their income from a number of different sources, which may include things like live performance, teaching, producing, session work, community development work, TV or film scoring, sales of merchandise, royalties income, as well as possibly part-time jobs outside of music.

When this crisis hit, our members immediately lost all of their live performance income. They may have also lost teaching income, session work income, and other income streams that they rely on. This has been a devastating loss. The data we have collected from our members so far, representing just 44 musicians (some members and some non-members), is over \$330,000 of losses, mostly in March and April, with more data coming in every day.

Being an incredibly resourceful group, the vast majority of independent musicians immediately began looking for other ways to earn income through their music.

Many began streaming concerts online and selling tickets or asking for donations. Some moved their teaching practices online using conferencing software. Session work, production work, and film and TV scoring might be able to continue through home studio work and passing files back

and forth electronically. Royalties are passive income that arrives at regular intervals. Merchandise sales can still take place online.

In short, many musicians have found a way to keep SOME income coming through the door, despite having lost large chunks of their income.

Disqualifying an independent musician because they have earned some income during this time is an extremely cruel twist on the promise of support from the federal government, and undermines the spirit of what the benefit is meant to do. In essence, you are punishing independent artists for having done their best to survive in an extremely challenging situation. Further, you are putting them in the position going forward of having to choose whether to TURN DOWN future work opportunities at this very difficult time in order to qualify for the benefit.

A more equitable solution would be to modify the criteria to pro-rate the benefit in some way based on how much income an individual is currently earning. This would allow individuals who have earned some income to be eligible for a top-up. Leaving the criteria as they stand now will only exclude the vast majority of independent musicians or force them into unfair and heartless choices that won't truly help them in this unprecedented situation.

If the federal government really cares about supporting our most vulnerable workers who don't have access to EI benefits, it needs to quickly clarify this aspect of the benefit and modify the requirement of \$0 income for 14 days.

I urge to you re-consider this criteria and create a benefit that will truly help workers in the gig economy.

Sincerely,

Eve Goldberg
President, AFM Local 1000