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October 21, 2025

Garth Rowsell, MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship
RSCommittee.Admin@assembly.ab.ca

Re: Review of the *Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act*

Thank you for the invitation to provide input on the review of the *Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act* (PIDA) that is currently taking place.

United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) represents more than 35,000 Registered Nurses, Registered Psychiatric Nurses and allied workers in Alberta. Nurses are bound by their Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice to speak up and intervene when they witness wrongdoing – especially if the act or omission creates a specific danger to the life, health, or safety of their patients.

To enable nurses to report wrongdoing it is critical that effective structures and systems are in place – ones that both encourage reporting and protect whistleblowers from reprisal. We believe that PIDA's existence, and its application across the public sector – inclusive of all health authorities, agencies, subsidiaries, and contracted health providers is essential to supporting the responsibility of nurses and all health care workers responsibility to speak up. This is fundamental to protecting the public: Albertans who access the health care system expect and trust that nurses will intervene to keep them safe.

We applaud the changes to the act that came into effect in 2018 following the 2017 review. We understand that another legislative review occurred in 2020-2021 and resulted in further recommended changes by Alberta's Public Interest Commissioner – recommendations that have yet to be adopted. We encourage the Standing Committee to review and implement the recommendations from the Commissioner's November 2020 report, which aim to expand the Act's scope, strengthen protections for whistleblowers and witnesses, and improve the Act's overall functionality.

We would like to highlight two specific recommendations from that report which are especially relevant to the health care sector:

- **Recommendation #1:** Enact a prescribed service provider regulation and expand its scope to all contracted service providers of a public entity. Currently, contracted providers of continuing care services for seniors are not covered by the Act. Adopting this recommendation would extend PIDA coverage to nursing homes under contract with a regional health authority, home care service providers contracted through a regional health authority, and seniors lodge accommodations licensed under the *Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act*. The Office of the Public Interest Commissioner (OPIC) has reported having to decline investigations into complaints involving these types of organizations due to a lack of jurisdiction.
- **Recommendation #5:** Ensure the Act includes all subsidiary health corporations. The current Regulation names specific subsidiary health corporations, but not all are included. Revising the Regulation to state that the Act applies to all subsidiary health corporations – rather than naming them individually – would prevent future gaps in coverage if a corporation's name changes or new subsidiaries are created.

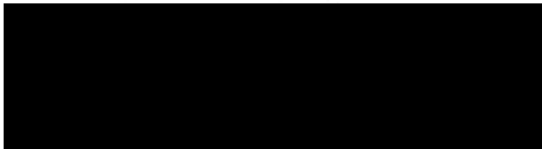
In February 2025, the Centre for Free Expression released a review of PIDA authored by Dr. Ian Bron, a leading Canadian scholar on whistleblowing. The report provides a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of the legislation's effectiveness and identifies areas for improvement. Dr. Bron notes that Alberta "has more best practices than any other major jurisdiction in Canada," but that these are "overshadowed by 'critical weaknesses' – shortcomings which experience has shown fatally undermine whistleblowing regimes." We strongly endorse the six recommendations outlined in Dr. Bron's report, which aim to strengthen whistleblower protections, improve the quality of investigations, and enhance the data used to evaluate and guide future changes.

Dr. Bron's report cites a 2024 survey conducted by OPIC which found that nearly two-thirds of public sector employees were unaware of the office's existence, with only 5% able to name it, and over half unaware or unsure of how to report wrongdoing within their own organizations. Currently, PIDA and its associated regulations do not set standards for employee awareness or training. A 2025 systematic review by Elsehrawy et al. on the factors influencing nurses' decisions to blow the whistle found that "a positive ethical climate in healthcare institutions is emerging as a key factor, as research shows that intentions to report misconduct are stronger when there is a good ethical climate and high organizational trust." This kind of climate and trust can only be fostered when leaders and employees receive appropriate training. Therefore, minimum standards for awareness and training should be included in the Act.

In conclusion, strengthening PIDA is essential to ensuring that nurses and other health care workers can report wrongdoing without fear of reprisal – ultimately safeguarding the health and safety of all Albertans. We urge the Standing Committee to adopt the recommendations put forward by both Alberta's Public Interest Commissioner and Dr. Ian Bron. By expanding the Act's scope, enhancing protections, and establishing training standards, we can promote a culture of transparency, trust, and ethical accountability within Alberta's health care system.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute feedback on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Heather Smith, President, UNA