



May 27, 2026

Dear Camp Director,

Our Association's objectives are:

1. To represent, advocate for, and advance the interests of camp counsellors working at overnight (sleepover) and day camps in Ontario.
2. To promote equitable, transparent, stable, safe, and supportive working conditions for camp counsellors.
3. To provide best-in-class employee experience guidance for camps seeking to enhance recruitment, retention, management, and training amongst camp counsellors.
4. To provide education and resources for camp counsellors and camps.
5. To foster a lasting and expanding community and collective power among camp counsellors across Ontario.
6. To engage with stakeholders, including private, public, for-profit, and not-for-profit camps, policymakers, and the public, on the issues affecting camp counsellors.
7. To do extra tasks that help support or are naturally connected to achieving the main goals.

**This letter is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. The OACC is an advocacy organization, not a law firm. The *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000 (ESA)* provisions summarized here are accurate to the best of our knowledge as of the date of this letter, but camps and employees are encouraged to consult the ESA directly or seek qualified legal counsel regarding their specific circumstances. Information about rates and standards may change.**

We all know camp is a demanding environment, and forgoing rest has often been expected. In speaking with many sleepover camp staff who cite exhaustion, burnout and negative mental health impacts as a result of not receiving necessary time off, our Board wanted to remind all Ontario sleepover camp management of some important aspects of the ESA that are relevant to sleepover camp counsellors.

In addition to the ESA requirements for rest, a major scientific study<sup>1</sup> reviewed over 50 years of research covering 154 studies and more than 5,700 people and has found that losing sleep has real, measurable effects on mental health.

- **Sleep loss drains positive emotion**
- **Even mild sleep loss increases anxiety**
- **Sleep loss causes emotional blunting<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Palmer CA, Bower JL, Cho KW, Clementi MA, Lau S, Oosterhoff B, Alfano CA. Sleep loss and emotion: A systematic review and meta-analysis of over 50 years of experimental research. *Psychol Bull.* 2024 Apr;150(4):440-463. doi: 10.1037/bul0000410. Epub 2023 Dec 21. PMID: 38127505.

<sup>2</sup> These points represent a summary of findings; readers are encouraged to review the full study: Palmer CA, Bower JL, Cho KW, Clementi MA, Lau S, Oosterhoff B, Alfano CA. Sleep loss and emotion: A systematic review and meta-analysis of over 50 years of experimental research. *Psychol Bull.* 2024 Apr;150(4):440-463. doi: 10.1037/bul0000410. Epub 2023 Dec 21. PMID: 38127505.

Protecting the right of staff to rest isn't just a kindness, and it's not just about following the law; it's a mental health intervention backed by decades of research. While many camps have invested in social workers and other mechanisms to support staff, the focus needs to be on building schedules that ensure every staff receives adequate rest in order that they can perform their important work in caring for campers.

**ESA Standards regarding minimum time off:**

1. Employees are to be allocated a minimum of 11 consecutive hours off work every day. This standard cannot be altered by any kind of agreement. <sup>3</sup>

*Example: A counsellor is assigned work at night that finishes at 11pm e.g. doing planned rounds to check on cabins etc., will only be scheduled to start work at 10am at minimum the following day.*

2. Employees must receive at least 24 consecutive hours away from work in a given work week or 48 consecutive hours away during a two-week work period. <sup>4</sup>
3. Any work done by an employee that is considered required training is also considered as work. <sup>5</sup>

*Example: A camp requires a camp counsellor to attend mandatory pre-camp from June 22 – June 27. Camp runs from June 28 - Aug 16. The counsellor will have worked 8 weeks at camp and will therefore receive 8 X 24 hours at a minimum in time off throughout the summer.*

4. Only in exceptional circumstances, can an employer require an employee to work during a required period free from work. Examples of exceptional circumstances include: natural disasters (very extreme weather); major equipment failures; fire and floods; an accident. Examples of situations that do not fall under the exceptional circumstances exemption: another employee fails to show up for work, busy periods etc. <sup>6</sup>

**ESA Standards regarding eating periods:**

1. Employees who work more than five consecutive hours are entitled to a 30-minute break free from work. Employers and employees are permitted to reach an agreement where the employee has two breaks (each 15 mins) with a total time of 30 minutes during every period of five working hours. <sup>7</sup>

*Example: A counsellor begins work by waking up their campers at 8am. They are scheduled to complete work when the campers go to bed at 9pm. This is a 13-hour shift and they will receive a minimum of 2 X 30 min breaks. The first set of breaks must have been taken by 1pm, the second set by 6pm.*

**The examples listed are illustrative and not exhaustive. Camps should consult the ESA directly or seek legal advice for guidance on specific situations.**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/hours-work#section-3>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/hours-work#section-3>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/hours-work>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/hours-work#section-5>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/hours-work#section-5>

**Additional standards for Canoe and Tripping staff:**

1. Wilderness guides (defined as a person who is employed to guide, teach, or assist a person or people while they are engaged in activities in a wilderness environment, including canoeing, kayaking, rafting, hiking) are not entitled to daily and weekly limits on work, daily rest periods, breaks between shifts, rest periods that are of a weekly/bi-weekly nature, and pay that is of an overtime or holiday nature.<sup>8</sup>
2. Such guides are also to be paid a wage that is different from those who work a regular minimum wage. Up until September 30, 2026, the minimum rate for such staff who work up to five consecutive hours is equal to \$88.05; for those who work more than five hours in a day, consecutive or not, the minimum rate is equal to \$176.15.<sup>9</sup>

**These figures listed above are current as of the date of this letter and are subject to change. Please verify current rates at [ontario.ca](http://ontario.ca).**

**ESA Standards for reprisals:<sup>10</sup>**

1. Employers cannot sanction employees or threaten to do so for any of the following reasons: for asking an employer to comply with the ESA, asking questions regarding the ESA and the rights included, filing a complaint of any nature in line with the ESA, or for exercising a right protected by the ESA or attempting to do so.
2. Employees are also protected from reprisal in situations where they give information to an employment standards officer, asking about the pay rate of another employee or discussing their wage with another employee for the purpose of determining whether the employer enforces equal pay policies.
3. This protection also applies when employees are or become eligible for leave, in addition to when they take or plan on taking leave as enforced under the ESA.
4. Employees also have protection from reprisal when they inquire about whether an individual or organization holds a license that allows them to act as a temporary help agency or a recruiter based on the stipulations of the ESA.
5. Employers cannot sanction employees for being under a garnishment order, defined as a court order to deduct pay for the purpose of satisfying a debt of any nature.
6. Employees are not to be penalized for participating in any proceeding stipulated by the ESA or any proceeding permitted by Section 4 of the Retail Business Holiday Act.
7. If an employee is subject to any of points 1 through 6, the employer is not allowed to punish, intimidate, suspend, or fire the employee. The employer also cannot reduce an employee's pay or threaten to sanction the employee in any of the ways previously listed.
8. In the case an employer follows through with any of the actions listed in point 7, an employment standards officer can order them to reinstate the employee, compensate the employee for a loss of any kind, or pay any income owed.

Sleepover Camp staff are often left in the dark when it comes to their rights on the job and oftentimes are not paid a significant portion of their wages until the end of the summer. This may make it more

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/minimum-wage>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/minimum-wage>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/reprisals>

challenging for counsellors and head staff to effectively self-advocate and ensure they are receiving ESA minimum protections for rest. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety cites several workplace situations that are connected to employee burnout while on the job. These can include factors that the employee cannot control and a lack of clarity with regard to job responsibilities, all of which can be seen to be applicable in the context of work at a camp.

The effects of such burnout can be seen to have a significant impact on employee performance while on the job. These include issues related to productivity, fatigue, a lack of appreciation for commitments, and even voluntary separation from job responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Our hope is that you were already aware of, have been, and will continue to ensure these essential rights to rest protected under the Ontario ESA (Employment Standards Act, 2000) are received by all your staff.

We also hope that as an employer of many youth workers, your camp can support its employees by ensuring they are made aware of their rights as stated by the ESA. For camps not already doing so, we strongly suggest that education on ESA minimum rest is included **prior to** the start of camp. This will allow for counsellors to have everything they need to know at their disposal, while also giving them the chance to put their best foot forward and ensure that they are delivering the best possible camp experience for campers.

In order to support all camps in educating employees, the OACC will also be engaging in a social media campaign prior to the start of the camp season.

We thank you for taking the time to review this letter and wish you, your staff and your campers a fun and healthy summer ahead.

Sincerely,

The OACC

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mh/mentalhealth\\_jobburnout.html](https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mh/mentalhealth_jobburnout.html)