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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CUPE PEI President Calls for ONE Minimum Wage “At a Higher Rate”
(NOT different minimum wage rates)**

Charlottetown – The lowest paid workers in Prince Edward Island need a minimum wage that is higher and not a discriminatory two-tier wage that would “push them deeper into poverty,” said Milo Murray, President of CUPE PEI which represents some 2,400 public sector employees on the Island.

Murray made his remarks in Summerside today before a legislative committee holding hearings on different minimum wage rates. If implemented, recent changes to the *Employment Standards Act* would mean that certain groups of workers could be paid a lower minimum wage than others.

“These changes will not affect the members of CUPE directly, but they will affect our community,” Murray said. “And right now, non-unionized workers earning minimum wage, who really have no one to represent them, are being left in the dark about their economic future and the security of their families.”

A lower ‘training wage’ Murray argued, is hard to justify for minimum wage jobs in food services and retail, where little or no training is needed and without any legal obligation on employers to actually provide training. It is most often our young, student, women and immigrant workers who pay the price of that type of wage. “We should be welcoming new entrants to the labour force and treat them with respect,” Murray said, “not discouraging them through discriminatory wages.”

As for workers in the hospitality industry being legislated a lower wage because they can earn gratuities, Murray pointed out that tips were a completely unreliable source of income. Many workers in the service industry are already financially vulnerable through part-time hours and short seasonal work periods. “Lower wages aren’t going to save the local coffee shop,” Murray said. “If locally owned businesses get lower wages, large corporations like Tim Horton’s and McDonald’s will get the cut too. This isn’t going to save local businesses from the competition of national chains.”

Instead of creating different minimum wages, CUPE PEI has asked government to increase the minimum wage rate to \$11.00 an hour in 2010 and tie it to the Consumer Price Index thereafter.

CUPE PEI’s President urged committee members to recommend against bringing in different minimum wages, a policy that Murray termed “harmful” to the citizens and communities of Prince Edward Island.

For more information/or an interview, call Milo Murray at (902) 888-8714.