

## IBEW LOCAL 2228

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers · FIOE

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**RE:** Staffing, Compensation & Classification for Canadian Coast Guard Electronics Technologists  
**TO:** Director General, Integrated Technical Services (cc: Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard)  
**FROM:** Jeff Wendt, Business Manager, IBEW Local 2228

Dear Director General,

I am writing in my capacity as Business Manager of IBEW Local 2228, which represents members across several Canadian Coast Guard branches, including the Canadian Coast Guard Academy and ITS technical staff in multiple regions. I am copying the Commissioner, as I believe the issues I am raising warrant awareness at the most senior level of the organization.

The members IBEW Local 2228 represents at the Coast Guard are electronic technologists responsible for the communications, navigation, and science equipment that Coast Guard vessels and shore stations depend on to operate. A ship does not sail without functioning communications and navigation electronics, and it does not stay at sea without people who can maintain and repair them. The issues I am raising touch on the Coast Guard's ability to attract, develop, and retain those people: staffing vacancies that have persisted for years, a hiring pipeline that is narrowing, compensation that is losing ground to competing employers, and a classification review that has been stalled for over a decade.

The Coast Guard is facing significant and compounding staffing challenges. Across the Academy and regional ITS operations, many positions have sat vacant for years, with the Western region alone reporting approximately twenty-five vacancies in the past year. The consequences are already tangible: preventative maintenance has been largely eliminated, increasing the risk of equipment failure, and manager-requested training is frequently going undelivered. Beyond the workload burden placed on the members who remain, what concerns me most is the damage that is not visible in a vacancy count. The Coast Guard's operational effectiveness depends on a deep, interdependent body of skills and knowledge that have been built over years and passed between people. Much of it cannot be documented in manuals. It cannot be onboarded in weeks. All the time that our trained members work without colleagues to mentor, that ecosystem is being quietly eroded. While the erosion may appear gradual, the effort required to rebuild what is lost is exponential.

At the Academy especially, six of what should be twelve full-time instructor positions are currently vacant, with a seventh departure imminent, and further departures anticipated in the near term that may leave as few as three permanent full-time instructors, at a time when demand is rising to expand training to both cover new technologies and fill gaps from knowledge that is no longer covered in schools. Retired staff are being brought back on contract to sustain operations, with only intermittent availability and limited connection to current technical developments in the field. Every hour a retiree spends developing or delivering training is an hour that is not being spent developing the next generation of instructors. It is an hour of acquired experience that will walk out the door at the end of the contract rather than add to the institutional knowledge. The stopgap is consuming the very capacity it is meant to protect. And while the Academy is perhaps

the most visible example, the same dynamic is playing out in technical shops across the organization.

The hiring pipeline is not keeping pace with these vacancies. The MELDEV pathway, the primary route for bringing electronics technologists into the organization, depends on a steady intake of graduates from three-year Electronics Technologist programs at post-secondary institutions. Over the last twenty years, many of those programs have closed. The result is a narrowing entry point into a pipeline that already takes a minimum of four years to produce a senior-level technologist. The hiring process itself compounds the problem. It is slow, the criteria are inconsistently applied, and the experience for candidates is poor enough that we have lost people to other employers simply because those employers moved faster. I myself applied to the Academy in 2020. Being bilingual and having worked at NAV CANADA for more than twenty years, I was informed I had been an excellent candidate at my first interview, but as this was more than eight months after submitting my application, I had already accepted other employment by that point. Finally, those who do enter through MELDEV often face a further obstacle: the training courses required to progress through their pay levels are frequently not being delivered, stalling their development and their advancement.

Having spoken with members at a variety of sites, a major issue beyond the hiring pipeline is the retention of staff, both new hires and, in some cases, experienced employees. For new staff, the financial reason to leave can be stark. Under the current collective agreement, an EL-02, the entry point for a newly hired electronics technologist, starts at \$58,836. Entry-level electronics engineering technologists in the private sector can average between \$67,000 and \$85,000, with top earners well above \$100,000 after only several years in many cases. NAV CANADA, whose technicians once worked alongside Coast Guard electronics staff under the same employer at Transport Canada before the organizations diverged in the mid-1990s, now pays its equivalent working levels between fifteen and thirty thousand dollars more per year at current rates. The federal pension and benefits are meaningful, but they do not close a gap of this size, particularly in regions where housing costs have made the effective purchasing power of these salaries far lower than the nominal figures suggest.

For departures of experienced staff, the story is different but no less concerning. Often, these were not employees who wanted to leave. They were employees who asked for reasonable accommodations, such as a transfer to a different location, a flexible schedule, or the ability to work remotely in a role that did not require daily ship access, and were told no. They then accepted offers elsewhere, often within the federal government, where those accommodations were granted without difficulty. The Coast Guard did not lose these people to better pay alone. It lost them to better management. Each of these departures represents years of developed expertise.

I recognize that collective bargaining is the primary vehicle for wage increases, and the union is prepared to engage fully in that process. A notice to bargain will soon be served, and we will be at the table. However, I want to be direct: when compensation affects both hiring and retention to the degree that it currently does, it becomes management's problem as much as ours. Especially with respect to cost of living pressures driving departures in high-cost regions, one could argue it is even more so management's problem than ours. A cost of living adjustment for affected regions is not something the union should have to fight management to obtain; it is something

management should be bringing to us as part of a genuine effort to retain a workforce it cannot afford to lose. We are willing to work collaboratively, but we need management to lead.

Compensation alone will not fix the structural barriers to hiring. The EL Classification and Job Evaluation Standard that governs these roles has not been meaningfully updated since 1993. The classification review for the Engineering Technologist and Technical Maintenance Planning Coordinator positions has been ongoing for well over twelve years, with at least one full cycle wasted when the Classification Office reviewed an outdated version of the submission rather than the revision that had been provided. The threshold for EL-O6 classification is understood. The submission has been revised. The work has been done. The bottleneck is the Classification Office, which has been deprioritizing these positions because they are vacant and therefore carry no financial impact to an incumbent. This is a self-reinforcing deadlock: the positions remain vacant because they are not properly classified, and they are not being prioritized for classification because they are vacant. Someone needs to break that cycle.

At the Academy, there is an additional compensation inequity that sits entirely within management's authority to address. Academy instructors receive no teaching premium, no level differential, and no instructor allowance, despite Ship's Officers assigned to the Academy receiving a classification level bump for the same posting, and despite instructor premiums being standard in the Canadian Armed Forces and other federal training environments. It is a management decision that has not been made, and it is contributing directly to the Academy's inability to attract qualified candidates.

I believe the people who have the authority to act on these issues need a clear picture of what is happening on the ground, and I believe these problems are solvable if they receive the right attention. I welcome meeting to discuss what this will look like.

In Solidarity,

**Jeff Wendt**

Business Manager  
IBEW Local 2228