

Labour ministry investigating IQT Solutions layoffs

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IQT Solutions workers protest on Monday at Oshawa City Hall, demanding answers for why they were laid off without notice or pay.

VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

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The provincial labour ministry is investigating a U.S.-based call centre after it abruptly laid off about 600 workers in Oshawa without proper notice, final pay cheques, or vacation and severance pay.

IQT Solutions, which provided customer service for Bell Canada, also terminated another 600 jobs in Quebec after reportedly running out of money on Friday.

“We realize the devastating effect that this has had on the community, the employees and their families,” said Greg Dennis, a labour ministry spokesman. “Our priority is to take care of workers, but we’re also trying to figure out exactly what has happened here.”

Both the Ontario and Quebec governments are meeting with laid off workers this week to discuss other employment opportunities and training programs.

Jen McGowan, who worked at IQT Solutions in Oshawa for five years, was entitled to at least four weeks' notice, according to the Employment Standards Act.

"We should have at least had some notice so we could've planned. I'm hoping that IQT will pay us what we're owed," said McGowan, who found out about the layoffs after a co-worker posted an angry status update on Facebook.

She said her co-workers received the news directly from supervisors the day of the layoffs.

On Monday morning, the 34-year-old single mother of three marched with about 100 workers to Oshawa City Hall with signs saying, "Give Us Our Money" and "IQT = No Job, No Food, No Shelter."

When contacted by the *Star*, IQT Solutions co-founder David Mortman refused to comment.

A sign posted at the company's Oshawa offices read: "Attention: IQT is now closed due to bankruptcy."

However, a records search revealed no official filing of bankruptcy.

IQT Solutions offers customer support services to a variety of companies in North America and Europe. Last June, the U.S. company announced it was opening a new call centre in Nashville, Tenn., after receiving a job creation grant of up to \$1.6 million (U.S.).

The labour ministry said Monday evening it was still trying to confirm the company's status.

The ministry usually assesses how much workers are entitled to and will issue notices to the employer to pay up, said a ministry spokesman. If they fail to comply, prosecution is possible depending on the company's status.

"It's absolutely despicable what this company has done," said Oshawa Councillor Nancy Diamond. "Some of these folks are owed a month's pay. They had no notice that they were going to be let go. They just got dumped."

Ontario Federation of Labour president Sid Ryan was also at the city hall protest to support employees.

“Basically, these workers were mistreated in many ways,” Ryan said. “Basically they kicked them out and just took off. (The workers) are not even unionized so they were out there like lost souls because they had no direction. Who do they turn to?”

For McGowan, all she wants is to collect her money and move on.

“We need what’s rightfully ours,” she said. “They can’t do this and run away.”

