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June 11, 2024

**BY E-MAIL**

Hamilton City Hall  
71 Main Street West, Second Floor,  
Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Dear Hamilton City Council:

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) believes that treating human plasma as something to buy and sell on the market is fundamentally wrong. We urge the Hamilton City Council to declare Hamilton as a “No Paid Plasma Zone” and send a clear message to Canadian Blood Services that we do not support cash-for-plasma in Ontario.

In 2022 Canadian Blood Services signed an exclusive 15-year deal with Grifols to run paid plasma centres in Ontario. This deal was negotiated and signed behind closed doors—**there was absolutely no transparency to the public in this deal**. The secrecy surrounding this decision severely limits public debate regarding its potential risks and dangers, and it neglects consideration of alternatives to paid plasma collection.

Now Canadian Blood Services and Grifols are trying to convince the public to trust for-profit corporations to collect plasma; yet, neither side will reveal the full details of their contract. It is a sign that Canadian Blood Services and Grifols have something to hide.

Our members work on the frontlines of public health care, including Canadian Blood Services. They are deeply concerned that paid plasma collection will pose serious harms to our current blood and plasma supply by opening the door to unaccountable corporations.

We have had this debate before when Canadian Plasma Resources tried to open a collection site in Hamilton next to a methadone clinic. Knowing the consequences of paid plasma collection, the Ontario government passed the *Voluntary Blood Donations Act* in 2014 to protect the integrity of our blood and plasma system.

We are urging you as leaders to stop this scheme again.

### **Paid plasma is about profit**

Canadian Blood Services argue that the products from paid plasma clinics will be used exclusively for patients in Canada. But now, where paid plasma is collected, it does not stay in Canada. Canadian Plasma Resources, who operates paid plasma centres in New Brunswick, ships their plasma to

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National Secretary-Treasurer/Secrétaire-trésorière nationale

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General Vice-Presidents/Vice-présidences générales

markets mostly in Europe. Their CEO said that Canadian plasma is potentially distributed to over 100 countries.<sup>1</sup>

Hamilton should not trust Grifols, who will acquire Canadian Plasma Resources by 2025, that they are going to change anything. If that were the case, they would have an open and transparent deal with input from the public. In fact, this month *The Breach* revealed that Grifols will be able to export plasma products for sale in other countries.<sup>2</sup>

**The goal of corporations like Grifols is to sell plasma protein products for profit—full stop.**

They sell their products on the global market to the highest bidder to make as much money as possible. They are driven by profits, not by the interest in protecting our plasma supply.

Even though some people in favour of paid plasma collection argue that it benefits low-income populations, the reality is that the donors are paid a mere fraction of what their plasma is worth. In the U.S. a donor could be paid \$50 for therapies worth at least \$300 per product.<sup>3</sup>

We know Grifols tends to locate their paid plasma centres in impoverished communities where they know they can find people looking for extra sources of income. This is simply unacceptable. As Mayor Andrea Horwath said, “anything that preys upon the most vulnerable is hideous and doesn’t belong in Hamilton.”<sup>4</sup>

Research shows that frequent plasma donations are not safe for donors. [A research study published this year](#) by SUPPLY, a project co-funded by the European Union’s EU4Health programme, found that frequent plasma donation negatively impacts donor health.<sup>5</sup> The donors they analyzed showed a reduction in immunoglobulin G and ferritin levels. The study concluded that European countries should increase the number of low-frequent plasma donors, rather than have an existing donor pool give their plasma frequently.

**Paid plasma is not guaranteed to be safe**

In the 1980s, over 30,000 Canadians were infected with HIV and Hepatitis C from contaminated blood products—this disaster is known as the “tainted blood scandal.” **It resulted in more than 8,000 innocent deaths and it is recognized as the worst preventable public health disaster in Canada’s history.**

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<sup>1</sup> Weldon, T. (2018, Jul 19). After 1 year, pay-for-plasma clinic in Moncton sees almost 300 visits weekly. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/moncton-blood-plasma-pay-donation-1.4752005#:~:text=Plasma%20collected%20in%20Moncton%20does,is%20no%20facility%20in%20Canada.&text=Despite%20the%20need%20in%20Canada,in%20Europe%2C%22%20Barhardoust%20said>

<sup>2</sup> Lukacs, M. (2024, Jun 3). Canadian blood plasma products can be sold abroad for profit by pharma giant. *The Breach*. <https://breachmedia.ca/canadian-blood-plasma-products-for-profit-pharma-giant/>

<sup>3</sup> Darrah, D., & Lukacs, M. (2022, Aug 2). Canada’s blood plasma collection to be sold off to foreign pharma giant. *The Breach*. <https://breachmedia.ca/canadas-blood-plasma-collection-to-be-sold-off-to-foreign-pharma-giant/#:~:text=Despite%20a%20lack%20of%20research,products%20worth%20at%20least%20%24300>

<sup>4</sup> Frketich, J. (2024, Apr 5). Mayor looks to declare Hamilton a ‘paid-plasma-free zone’ to stop private Spanish clinic from opening. *Hamilton Spectator*. [https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/mayor-looks-to-declare-hamilton-a-paid-plasma-free-zone-to-stop-private-spanish-clinic/article\\_b7c32f26-aeec-56bf-b08e-ab04defeb4e1.html](https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/mayor-looks-to-declare-hamilton-a-paid-plasma-free-zone-to-stop-private-spanish-clinic/article_b7c32f26-aeec-56bf-b08e-ab04defeb4e1.html)

<sup>5</sup> Centre for Evidence-Based Practice. (2024, Apr 8). What is the impact of repeated plasma donation on donor health? <https://www.cebp.org/news/what-is-the-impact-of-repeated-plasma-donation-on-donor-health/>

This happened in part because inadequately screened blood, often coming from “high-risk” populations like American prisoners and impoverished communities, entered the system through blood transfusions.<sup>6</sup> Those responsible for this disaster failed to properly screen blood donors, failed to test blood properly, and failed to warn the public that there were risks with paid plasma collection. Justice Krever, who led a full investigation of the disaster, said that the donors may have had an incentive to donate even when they knew they should not have.

We are aware that screening technology has advanced since the tainted blood scandal. **But even though technology has improved, we are not convinced that paying for plasma is 100% safe today and we cannot have another tainted blood disaster.**

We must remember the lessons from the Krever Commission. Justice Krever said that the tainted blood scandal was driven in part by the profit motive. He recommended that we stop paid blood and plasma collection, and he made it clear that means having a fully voluntary, non-paid blood and plasma donation system. Paid collection should only happen in very specific circumstances.

Today, unlike the 1980s and '90s, we can test for HIV and Hepatitis C; however, **we cannot test for what is unknown.** A new blood-borne pathogen could impact the blood and plasma supply in ways we cannot anticipate right now.

The World Health Organization agrees that voluntary donation is the safest option. Last year the organization called for all countries to move to unpaid donation systems given research that found volunteers have the lowest prevalence of blood-borne infections.<sup>7</sup>

We need to ensure that our national blood authority—Canadian Blood Services—is the only gatekeeper of our system, not a corporation whose lobbying and involvement has been kept secret.

Fundamentally, CUPE believes that blood products are a **public resource**. This means no one should be collecting, influencing the supply of, or profiting from it except our public system.

### **Paid plasma will weaken our donor base**

Our members on the frontlines of Canadian Blood Services have also expressed deep concerns that paid plasma collection will weaken our voluntary blood donor program, which would jeopardize our national blood supply.

This happens because long-time donors start to lose motivation and stop giving. Other donors opt for payment from paid centres instead. One paid “donor” out of our system is one volunteer donor taken from our supply chain—over time this will dwindle the base of volunteer donors.

For example, in December 2016, Canadian Blood Services announced that volunteer blood donation in Saskatoon declined due to the arrival of paid plasma centres. Canadian Blood Services insist that they are going to put a limit to the amount of paid plasma centres, but we believe as soon as Grifols opens a centre in Hamilton it will be difficult to stop them from lobbying for more.

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<sup>6</sup> DePalma, A. (1999, Jan 29). Suit says Canada imported tainted blood from U.S. inmates. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/29/world/suit-says-canada-imported-tainted-blood-from-us-inmates.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20panel's%20final,to%20accept%20prison%20blood%20products>.

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. (2023, Jun 2). Blood safety and availability. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/blood-safety-and-availability>

The deal with Grifols is also based on the false pretense that the only way to increase our plasma supply is to do business with corporations. But other provinces have shown that there are alternatives.

Hema-Quebec increased their plasma supply from 15%-30% and they are on track to reach 50% plasma self-sufficiency by voluntary donations alone.<sup>8</sup> They did this by successfully starting a public education campaign and established several new donation centres. Their efforts increased voluntary plasma donation, nearly doubling the amount of plasma they received. They have shown we can do it too, we just need to have the political will to stand up to rich, multinational corporations.

### **Conclusion**

We urge Hamilton City Council to continue supporting a public, not-for-profit, voluntary blood and plasma donation system. **Please declare Hamilton as a “No Paid Plasma Zone”** and send a strong message that paid plasma collection should not be allowed here, and in the rest of the province.

Sincerely,

*Alia Karim*

Alia Karim, Senior Research Officer

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<sup>8</sup> Dowson, A. L. (Sep 8, 2022). Canadian Blood Services is betraying the public trust. *Canadian Health Coalition*. <https://www.healthcoalition.ca/canadian-blood-services-is-betraying-the-public-trust/#:~:text=In%20the%20same%20time%20frame,sufficiency%20by%20voluntary%20donations%20alone>