**Andrews government gives public servants green light to skip work for protest**

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The Andrews government has given public servants the green light to down tools and join a climate rally expected to bring much of Melbourne's CBD to a standstill on Friday.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet sent out an email saying a number of public servants wanted to attend the 2pm march and could ask for "flexible working arrangements".

School students striking for climate change also received the backing of the Premier's department, which said their actions should be celebrated.

Protesters calling for greater global action will gather at Treasury Gardens at 2pm and march from 3pm to Collins Street towards Exhibition Street and then on to Flinders Street and back to their starting point.

But with numbers expected to exceed the 50,000 who took part in March’s action, the final route of the march is still to be agreed with Victoria Police.

The rallies, to be held across Australia, have the support of unions and more than 1500 businesses and organisations.

A Victorian government spokesman insisted it did not want students missing school but understood the passion young people had for tackling climate change.

“We want our kids to be engaged in the world around them, so we don’t think it’s fair to criticise students for holding a peaceful protest about an issue as important as this,” he said. “We should celebrate the fact they care enough to want to do something about it.”

The rally will be held on the final afternoon of the state school term. Previous school strikes have seen thousands of students leave class and flood the CBD.

An email to staff from Industrial Relations Victoria management said “a number” of Victorian public servants were expected to join the rally.

It said they could apply for leave or seek “flexibility around hours” to attend the protest.

“Departments and agencies should have regard to their operational requirements in considering applications for leave, to ensure an appropriate standard of service can be maintained,” it said.

In a statement, Melbourne School Strike 4 Climate said tens of thousands of school students and workers were expected to join the protest.

“On Friday we're striking to build the movement that we need to lead a path out of the climate crisis,” the statement said.

The group said more than 100 Australian cities and towns were joining the strike.

The Australian Education Union has endorsed the rally.

Victorian branch president Meredith Peace said the union told members they should take leave or make other appropriate arrangements with their schools if they planned to attend the strike.

“We’ll send a central office group to show our support with our banners,” she said.

Ms Peace said young people were frustrated with inaction on climate change.

“The kids have every right to use their voice,” she said. “I’ve heard them speak at a number of forums. They’re very well informed. They are very articulate. They should be out there making their views known because it’s their future.”

The strikes will come three days before world leaders meet in New York at the United Nations emergency climate summit.

An Education Department spokesman said schools played an important role in helping students learn about the issues they felt strongly about but each day of school was important.

“It is well known that time out of the classroom means that students can fall behind,” he said.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Premier and Cabinet said the advice regarding public servants was issued by Industrial Relations Victoria in response to queries about the climate change rally. She said the advice applied to circumstances where employees sought leave from their duties.