

August 10, 2017

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Alana, and I am a student at McMaster University, starting a Masters in Global Health this September. I am writing to you, because as a young female in academia, knowing that my Government is taking proactive steps to ensure that work is paid and valued equally regardless of one's gender is exceedingly important to me.

While the government has taken some significant steps in realizing its feminist agenda, the area that is most lagging behind is women's economic security. As you can see, this study is timely and important.

In January, Oxfam revealed that two billionaires own more wealth than the bottom 30% of the Canadian population. Growing inequality undermines progress in tackling inequality and is particularly negative for women, who continue to make up the majority of the world's poor. Around the world, as in Canada, women are the lowest-paid workers, with minimal security and physical safety.

Our current economic model relies on women's cheap labour to maximize shareholders' profits, which explains why economic growth does not necessarily reduce inequality or even provide hope of escaping poverty. While economic growth increases when men and women participate equally in the economy, growth on its own is not efficient to move the needle on gender equality. I support Oxfam Canada's recommendations which outline the five areas we must focus in order for growth to be truly inclusive.

Number 1: The government should ensure that workers make living wages. Women make up 60% of the minimum-wage earners in Canada. Women are often forced into low-paid and insecure jobs because they have less of a safety net, in part because of difficulties accessing employment insurance; and if they receive benefits, these are too low for them to make ends meet. But nowhere in Canada does the minimum wage constitute a living wage. Without a living wage, women do not stand a chance of working their way out of poverty or achieving economic equality. *The government should commit to being a living wage employer and ensure that federal government contracts are only given to living wage employers. The provinces and private sector must follow suit. The government should also support women's organizing here at home by increasing the budget of Status of Women Canada and abroad.*

Number 2: The government should make pay equity a priority. Women are paid less than men in 469 out of 500 occupations monitored by Statistics Canada. The wage gap is even more accentuated for racialized, indigenous, and immigrant women. Also, as women face the added challenge of moving in and out of employment to take on care responsibilities for children, elderly, and the sick, often without employment insurance, their earning potential is much reduced. *The government should speed up the introduction of pay equity legislation. The government should use every tool available to ensure that all provinces enact pay equity legislation. In addition, the government should lower the threshold of employment insurance and tie it to need rather than earnings, and improve the Canada pension plan and guaranteed income supplement benefits.*

Number 3: The government must comprehensively address violence against women. Gender-based violence has a significant impact on women's security, and women's economic insecurity can make them more vulnerable to violence. Also, absenteeism and poor work performance as a result of violence can leave victims vulnerable to discipline and job loss. *The government should develop and implement a national action plan on violence against women. While the federal strategy on gender-based violence is a good first step, a comprehensive national action plan is needed to ensure women everywhere have the same levels of services and protection. We are also calling for legislation that gives victims of violence the right to time away from work without losing their job, as enacted in Manitoba.*

Number 4: The government must invest in the care economy. In rich and poor countries alike, the responsibility for unpaid care work falls disproportionately to women. In Canada, women undertake 3.9 hours of unpaid care work every day, compared to 2.4 hours undertaken by men. Part of the challenge of shifting care responsibility between men and women is social norms. *The government should sustain and increase funding for child care so that quality care is accessible to all by 2020. This needs to be complemented by initiatives to ensure living wages and pay equity for child care workers, and supplemented with equitable family leave support and flexible work arrangements.*

Number 5: Addressing women's economic insecurity requires domestic and global leadership. In a globalized world, women's economic insecurity in Canada is caused by the same factors driving economic insecurity for women around the world. The global economy is built on the backs of women as corporations engage in a race to the bottom in wages and labour standards. No matter in which country, the government has to take responsibility and hold Canadian corporations to account for their footprint in the world. *The government should seriously consider corporate accountability as part of its feminist agenda and to commission a study to look at specific ways in which it can move forward in this area*

I fully support the recommendations and amendments put forward in the submissions by Oxfam Canada and look forward to seeing the committee recommendations.

Sincerely,

Alana Changoor