

Electoral Reform Committee Submission

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My name is Brynne Sinclair-Waters. I work in the postsecondary education sector and am a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Union Local 1281.

I grew up into a society that is becoming increasingly unequal. Canada's 100 highest paid CEOs make, on average, 184 times more than the typical Canadian worker.ⁱ Far too much wealth and power is concentrated among a small elite, while the rest of us are struggling to pay off debts and working in low-paying jobs.

Growing inequality is feeding disaffection with both our economic and political system.

I believe that democracy must act as a counter against these trends, *but today's electoral system is not serving us well in this regard.

In my experience, many people who care deeply about growing inequality and are actively involved in making the economy more fair, for example by advocating for a \$15 minimum wage – *even these* politically engaged people – often do not feel that engaging in electoral politics is worthwhile. *That's a problem.

A proportional system can help overcome this lack of engagement, and support building a fair society where political and economic power is less concentrated.

Research shows that countries with proportional systems have considerably lower levels of inequalityⁱⁱ, and that when systems become more proportional, inequality actually decreases.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is because when the system is more representative, more people participate, and the government becomes responsive to the demands of a wider range of voters.

Experts have also argued that proportional representation can help limit elite control over decision-making.^{iv} Providing more avenues for people's views to be heard in Parliament, makes it harder for governments to ignore issues that are important to Canadians.

As a young woman, I am also encouraged that countries with proportional systems have elected more women to parliament.^v

Guided by values of fairness and equality, I encourage the Committee to recommend Mixed Member Proportional representation, which could significantly improve citizen engagement and the quality of representation, while also providing elected representatives with a personal connection to their ridings and the issues facing their constituents.

ⁱ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *The Pay Clock: CEO vs Average Pay in Canada*.

ⁱⁱ Lijphart, Arend (2012). *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in 36 Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Birchfield, Vicki and Crepaz, Markus (1998). "The Impact of Constitutional Structures and Collective and Competitive Veto Points on Income Inequality in Industrialized Democracies. *European Journal of Political Research* 34: 175–200. AND Verardi, Vincenzo (2005). "Electoral Systems and Income Inequality." *Economics Letters*, 861: 712, January 2005.

^{iv} Orellana, Salomon (2014). *Electoral Systems and Governance: How Diversity Can Improve Policy Making*. New York: Routledge Press.

^v Lijphart, Arend (2012). *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in 36 Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale Press.