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Standing Committee on the Status of Women
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WOMEN AND THE WORKFORCE

This is presented by the **Advancement of Women in Halton (AWH)**, a collective of women's groups, organizations and agencies located in the Halton Region, Ontario.

Our thoughts on how to implement, enforce and monitor effective positive change for women in today's workforce. While we recognize that many of the concerns are not just federal responsibility, but provincial as well, solutions must be a collaborative effort by all levels of government.

Public awareness is key to changing accepted norms of gender bias in workplace. Employers and employees, parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, and the public need to understand that traditional thinking is changing and it must be encouraged to continue to change.

Tuition fees for colleges and universities often prevent people from following their chosen career paths. Capping tuition fees or ensuring that government subsidies leave graduates without residual debt would ensure a better educated, and a more competitive workforce.

As women continue to make up a large part of the Canadian workforce, it is important to revisit the abolition of harassment of women. Laws prohibiting bullying, verbal, physical or emotional threats, and sexual assault must be established and enforced with real and strong penalties to ensure women have equal rights in the workplace.

Standardization of Hiring Practices

Fair hiring practices are critical to the success of women's full participation in the workforce. Trade unions have been role models for fair hiring practices in Canada. The use of grids for starting non-gendered salaries and ongoing increases must be transparent to all employees. These salary scales should be transparent to all job applicants. Recognition of experience and qualifications can be included in the defined salary grid. Clearly, there would need to be increases based on merit and service.

Financial incentives from the government to drive pay equity in businesses would keep this initiative on track. Transparency for pay scales and competitive promotional opportunities in house would level the playing field for women in the workforce. This model would prevent women and men from being hired into jobs at different starting salaries. Access to pay rates for all salary levels will keep equity at the forefront of hiring practices.

Probation periods are often used by the employer as a way of keeping wages as low as possible. One employee after another is hired, but always on probation. Rules need to be in place to protect probationary employees within reasonable parameters.

Maternity Leave and Affordable Childcare

Women on maternity leave are still at risk of losing their jobs due to restructuring or returning to a position significantly different from the one they vacated. How can these jobs be protected, regardless of whether the workplace is unionized? A woman's salary will generally drop behind because of her maternity absence. Statistics show that women at child bearing age, experience a flattening of both their income and career advancement. In some cases, they never recover from this, or recover inadequately much later in their working life.

This negatively affects pensions and impacts family dynamics, family planning, pension contributions, the provincial and national economy and gross national product. At the same time Canadian women on maternity leave need opportunities to contribute to CPP and company pensions to ensure financial security.

Affordable childcare is a parental issue, not the sole responsibility of the mother. Families need affordable, regulated childcare. Whether run by employers, privately or by the government, all childcare facilities need to be licensed with restrictions for renewal in place. Government run facilities should set the standard and act as training facilities for all licensed childcare facilities. Childcare costs need to be controlled or subsidized to minimize the long-lasting impacts on a woman's annual income and career.

Precarious Employment

Precarious employment has established itself as a permanent national trend. People, particularly women, need to have more than one job to make ends meet. The lack of security in the workplace makes it difficult to move ahead with planning, purchasing homes, education, or just to put food on the table.

The new strategy needs to return to non-gendered, full-time or part-time positions, with a fair living wage for all employees. This is a path to making female dominated job fields fair and equitable. These changes need to be implemented in all businesses, regardless of size and should include the nonprofit sector, which is dominated by women.

Generally, work within the charitable sector is seen as having low value even though it contributes over \$100.7 billion to Canada's Gross Domestic Product. Although this sector of the workforce is generally better educated and skilled, the women doing the work are poorly compensated. Precarious employment, low wages, fewer health and retirement benefits all have immediate and long-term economic impacts.

All positions, whether profit or nonprofit, full-time or part-time, should have access to benefits. This will create a healthier provincial and federal economy while relieving the pressure of surviving at poverty level incomes. The reinstatement of personal leave, vacation, and sick leave with full or partial benefits will create a much healthier environment for families in Canada.

Government implementation and ongoing monitoring would be required across all sectors, whether they are publicly funded or privately owned. Precarious employment and non-secure, low paying jobs heavily affect women and children, therefore, without these types of changes made to employment laws, the Gender Wage Gap will continue.

Other:

AWH also supports changes that:

- Ensure the dignity of work and core principles of decent employment for all workers;
- Establishes that a worker must be presumed to be an employee, as opposed to an independent contractor, unless the employer demonstrates otherwise;
- Establishes and enforces equal pay for work of equal value including benefits
- Supports raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2017 and indexes it annually
- Reduces barriers to unionization for workers in precarious employment.

Members of AWH also recognize it is critical for three important actions to take place to make a difference in the lives of the women who make up 52 % of Canada's population beyond setting policy. There needs to be plans in place for:

- Implementation of the policy,
- Its enforcement, and
- The ongoing monitoring.

Sincerely,



Ancilla Ho-Young
Chair, Advancement of Women Halton (AWH)