



Pay Equity... at the Heart of Equality

The Pay Equity Network

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Valentine's Day message to Parliament: show us you care!

OTTAWA – A national Pay Equity Network today launched its campaign to pressure the federal government to enact legislation that will finally make equal pay for work of equal value a reality.

The Network, which has gathered the support of over 150 women's groups, unions and equality-seeking organizations, sent Valentine's Day cards to all Members of Parliament and Senators asking them to show they care about women's economic equality by enacting proactive pay equity legislation.

"More than 25 years after the adoption of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA), women still face wage discrimination," says Canadian Labour Congress Executive Vice-President Marie Clarke Walker. "A Pay Equity Task Force, appointed by the federal government, confirmed in its 2004 report that women are earning 71% of the wages paid to men for comparable jobs. The situation is even worse for racially visible women, who earn 64%, and Aboriginal women who earn a mere 46%."

According to Clarke Walker, it's obvious that existing pay equity legislation, contained in the CHRA, is not eliminating the discrimination. "The current law forces individual women or their unions to file complaints in order to achieve pay equity. A law that was intended to end pay discrimination has produced a long, tortuous process that too often ends up in court. The process is so expensive to pursue that it is beyond the reach of most of the women it was designed to benefit."

An example of how unwieldy the process has become is the complaint filed by the Communications, Energy and Paperworker's Union against Bell Canada which the union has pursued for 15 years and continues in spite of repeated legal challenges. A complaint by the Public Service Alliance of Canada against Canada Post is still unresolved after over 20 years. And these are just two examples. Even more disturbing, women without unions don't have the resources to challenge their employers' pay practices.

The Pay Equity Network isn't the only group that has recognized that there is a problem. In spite of Canada's domestic and international obligations to provide equal pay for work of equal value, the problem is so serious that a United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) Committee has taken Canada to task for its failure to do so.

"The federal government appointed the Task Force in 2001 to review the current situation," says Andrée Côté, Director of Legislation and Law Reform with the National Association of Women and the Law. "They conducted a thorough review and issued a comprehensive report last year. The Task Force recognized pay equity as a fundamental human right and recommended that the government enact proactive pay equity legislation. Yet women are still waiting for the government to act."

"Our Valentine's Day message is a reminder to MPs that pay equity is at the heart of women's equality, and that pay discrimination cannot continue to be ignored," says Côté. "In the upcoming months, women across the country will be telling their MPs that the time for action is long overdue and holding them accountable for the ongoing discrimination. We're going to make sure they get the message that we want a proactive law now."

For a list of Pay Equity Network supporters: www.nawl.ca

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