



Diocese of Toronto

Anglican Church of Canada

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
of the Ontario Legislature

Re. Bill 148: The Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017

July 21, 2017

Introduction

As Anglicans, we are called by our baptismal covenant to “strive for justice and peace among all people”, and to “respect the dignity of every human being.”¹ Accordingly, we believe that a healthy and just society is one in which everyone can live in dignity. One key aspect of dignity for all is for workers to receive a fair return for their labour. Precarious and underpaid labour undermines the dignity of those who perform it.

Our holy scriptures support our call for adequate remuneration and just treatment of workers. From the admonition of Deuteronomy not to withhold the wages of poor labourers, whether they be citizens or foreigners (Deut. 24:14) to Jesus’ dictum that “the labourer deserves to be paid” (Luke 10:7), the Bible reminds us of the worth and dignity of labour and of those who perform it.

For several years, our Diocese has been advocating for this Province to take measures to ensure the dignity and flourishing of Ontarians, through investments in affordable housing, income supports, and other measures of poverty reduction. One of the measures we have consistently called for has been to increase the minimum wage so that full-time workers do not live in poverty. Indeed, in 2014, seventy-four congregations in our Diocese, representing 20,000 Anglicans on their combined parish rolls, endorsed a call to raise the minimum wage to \$14.50/hr by 2015.

As Archbishop Colin Johnson, metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario and Diocesan Bishop of Toronto, has indicated, Anglicans strongly support many of the recommendations of the Changing Workplaces Review. We welcome the government’s plans, through Bill 148, to increase the minimum wage to \$14/hr by January 1, 2018 and to \$15/hr by January 1, 2019. We also welcome the announcement of provisions to extend equal pay to part-time, temporary, casual and seasonal workers doing the same work as full-time workers and the expansion of the definition of who is an employee. We are glad to see the expansion of access to personal emergency leave and vacation time, improved employee scheduling provisions, and measures to improve the enforcement of employment standards.

We urge this Government to uphold and strengthen the measures of the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act 2017* to help ensure the dignity and flourishing of all workers in Ontario.

1. Minimum Wage Increase

Ontario’s minimum wage has not kept pace with the province’s growing economy, nor the increasing cost of living. The minimum wage today, adjusted for inflation, is barely one dollar more than it was forty years ago, despite a 40% increase in economic productivity.² Moreover, the number of minimum wage workers as a proportion of the labour force is increasing. Despite the common perception of minimum wage workers as teenagers working part-time or summer jobs, over 60% of Ontarians earning minimum wage in 2015 – and over 80% of workers earning less than \$15/hr - were over 20.³ Many of those who would see a benefit from the minimum wage increase are women and recent immigrants, who tend to be over-represented in low-wage jobs.⁴ Thus the minimum wage increase would reduce the gender pay gap as well as overall income inequality.

¹ “Holy Baptism”, *Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto: The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 1985), p. 159.

² <http://www.progressive-economics.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EconomistsSupport15inOntario.pdf>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2017/07/Ontario_Needs_a_Raise_2017.pdf

The common refrain from the business community is that an increase in the minimum wage will hurt businesses (especially small businesses) and lead to job loss. The evidence does not bear this out. Research from the US-based National Employment Law Project examined minimum wage increases over seven decades from 1938 to 2009 and found that in fact the opposite was true – that minimum wage increases actually led to increased employment in 68 percent of cases.⁵ While a recent study from the University of Washington appears to suggest that Seattle’s minimum wage hike has led to a loss of work hours and thus earnings for low-wage workers, this study has also been criticized for excluding data from 40% of the city’s workforce.⁶ Overall, the data indicates that a raise in minimum wage is good for the economy, reducing workplace turnover and absenteeism and boosting employee morale, productivity, and overall employment stability. Moreover, when minimum wage workers spend their increased wages, they are likely to spend them in the community, leading to economic growth.

The argument that raising the minimum wage will disproportionately hurt small businesses also fails to account for the fact that 59% percent of those benefitting who work in the top two industries for low-wage work – food service and accommodations – are employed by companies with over 500 employees. Only 17% of the workers in those industries who would benefit from increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hr are employed by small businesses (those with fewer than 20 employees)⁷

Moreover, as people who strive to shape our lives in accordance with principle, we must ask ourselves whether a business model which seeks to make a profit while keeping its workers in poverty is one which deserves to be perpetuated. It is human beings which have worth and dignity, not corporations

Accordingly, we support the proposed changes to the minimum wage and urge that the increases be indexed to inflation so that low-wage workers will not be left behind by the economy to which they contribute.

2. Treating employees equally

We welcome the provisions of Bill 148 that ensure casual, part-time, temporary and seasonal employees are paid equally to full-time employees performing the same work for the same employer, and prohibit employers from treating employees as if they were not employees under the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*. While there can be legitimate business reasons for employing different classes of employee in the workplace, employers should not be able to do so in order to provide lower rates of compensation or weaker labour standards for employees of different status. These measures will help to protect against such unscrupulous use of different classes of employee.

However, together with our partners at the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) and our fellow Anglicans in the Diocese of Niagara, we would like to express our concern that there continue to be too many loopholes for employers to justify differentiations in pay, whether by making minor differences in duties assigned to workers, through exceptions incorporated in the proposed legislation, or through grand-parenting provisions of collective agreements. We agree with ISARC that one of the principles of the Employment Standards Act is that it should provide a floor below which no worker should fall. We therefore join them in **recommending that all grand-parenting provisions with**

⁵ <http://www.nelp.org/publication/raise-wages-kill-jobs-no-correlation-minimum-wage-increases-employment-levels/>

⁶ <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/07/04/minimum-wage-hike-wont-bring-doom-and-gloom-economists-say.html>

⁷ https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2017/07/Ontario_Needs_a_Raise_2017.pdf

respect to collective agreements negotiated before April 1, 2018, be removed from the proposed legislation.

3. Expanded emergency leave.

We commend the expansion of personal emergency leave to ten days per year for employees of all workplaces, regardless of size, and that some portion of this leave be paid leave. **We recommend extending the paid portion of the leave beyond the first two days.** Whether the employee needs the personal emergency leave to attend to their own ill-health or that of a family member, they should not feel economic coercion to attend work while ill (thus exposing coworkers and clients to infection) nor while their child or close family member needs their personal care.

4. Improved employee scheduling.

We also commend the proposed legislative provisions to bring a measure of fairness into employee scheduling. The rise of precarious work has led to more uncertainty and stress for employees, in particular with regard to securing child care and meeting other family obligations, and limits their ability to contribute to the community outside the workplace – including participation in religious service. Providing a minimum of three hours' pay for shifts three hours or less, minimum pay for being on call, notice for scheduling changes and for a reasonable response to employees' requests for a scheduling change help signal that workers are not mere commodities but individuals to be treated with dignity and respect.

Conclusion

We welcome the provisions of Bill 148 as concrete steps toward reducing poverty among low-wage workers and recognizing the dignity and worth of Ontarians in the workforce. If anything, we believe some of its provisions could be strengthened even further. We believe these measures will go a long way toward enhancing the wellbeing of employees, improving the productivity and resilience of our workforce, and allowing Ontarians to share more equitably in our province's abundance. We urge your Committee to complete its deliberations in time to enable the Legislature to finalize the contents of the Bill and pass it before the end of 2017, so that the promise of a Fairer Workplace and Better Jobs can be realized in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations and for your public service to the people of this Province.