

## Submission to the Changing Workplaces Review On Personal Emergency Leave

August 31, 2016

### Contact

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### Campaign 2000

Campaign 2000 is a national, non-partisan network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Canada. Ontario Campaign 2000 is a provincial partner with over 70 member organizations across the province.  
[www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca)

## Introduction

Ontario Campaign 2000 is a provincial coalition of 70 active partner organizations committed to eradicating child and family poverty in Canada. Our membership is broad and diverse. It includes faith groups, educators who belong to ETFO, OSSTF and OECTA, the health and community sectors serving children and families, labour and academics and low income and working families from Thunder Bay to Peel Region to Windsor. For 19 years, Campaign 2000 has carefully monitored poverty and related social policies at the federal and provincial levels through our annual report cards on child and family poverty.

We are encouraged that the Ontario government has taken steps to improve and update the Employment Standards Act (ESA), as many low income families are engaged in precarious work and need full access to leave entitlements. However, it is difficult to separately review Personal Emergency Leave (PEL) without addressing the other important related issues in the Changing Workplaces Review. Given this, we do call for revisions to PEL under the ESA to support low income Ontarians who are struggling to take care of their families, by allowing all Ontario workers to be eligible for the 10 day unpaid leave.

## Child and Family Poverty and the Working Poor

Ontario Campaign 2000 is troubled by the persistence of high poverty rates in Ontario. In 1989, all parties in the House of Commons voted unanimously to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. In 2015, one in five children (20%) and 15.4% of Ontario families with children were living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> With increasing costs of basic necessities such as housing, food, and child care, the ability for parents to find and keep their jobs is essential.

## Labour Market and the Working Poor

Families in low income struggle to make ends meet as neither work nor income security programs provide assured pathways out of poverty. In 2011, 40% of children in poverty lived in a family with full-time, full year work.<sup>2</sup> The ability to take emergency leave is critical for families who are financially struggling as they are more likely not to have other supports to assist them when their child or parent is unwell. Less than 25% of low wage workers get paid leave, and thus rely on PEL as a form of job security and protection. Yet, many workers are employed at businesses which have less than 50 employees and are exempt from providing PEL. This greatly impacts low wage workers and families with children living in poverty as workers are placed in a

<sup>1</sup> <http://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Ontario2015Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Campaign 2000. 2014 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada.

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situation of having to take care of themselves or their child and/or possibly losing their job. This increases the burden low income families already face and could lead to further negative health outcomes both for the parent and/or child.

In addition many low wage workers are newcomers and immigrants who may have caregiving responsibilities in another country (i.e. a child or parent in another country). In times of urgent need, these workers should be able to use the PEL to travel back home and take care of their loved ones.

### **Working Poor and Their Health**

People with low income face great health inequities and lower health outcomes. As noted in the “Income and Health: Opportunities to achieve health equity in Ontario” Report, the poorer you are, the worse your health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> When low income workers are not able to take off work when they or their family members are sick, the health problems they may already be experiencing are exacerbated and can place greater stress on the health care system. It also poses a possible population health risk as many low wage workers work with the public and if they are not provided the time to stay home when they are sick, it could increase the spread of infectious diseases.

### **Recommendation**

Given the Ontario government’s commitment to eliminate poverty through its Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ontario Campaign 2000 recommends that changes to the PEL in the ESA be aligned with the goal of eradicating poverty among all Ontarians. The realities experienced by low-income workers must be taken into account to provide them with greater income security and job stability.

- We recommend option 2 within the Interim Report to remove the exemption for companies that regularly employ fewer than 50 employees

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/documents/system-performance/health-equity-report-en.pdf>

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