



# Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries  
55 Dickson Street, Unit 14  
Cambridge, On  
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July 28, 2015

Changing Workplaces Review, ELCPB,  
400 University Ave., 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON  
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To Whom It May Concern:

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (SPCCND) hosted a poverty symposium on the “The Working Poor”. The symposium generated discussion on precarious employment, part-time work, temp agencies, low wages and workers’ rights. Many participants at the symposium were disheartened when they discovered that Ontario has developed a low-wage economy with 33 percent of workers in 2014 earning low wages in contrast to only 22 percent in 2004<sup>1</sup> and that individuals who work full-time making minimum wage earn almost 17 percent below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently these community members were motivated to take action and approached the SPCCND to host a community forum on workers’ rights. As a result the SPCCND partnered with the House of Friendship and hosted a region wide community forum on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 on the Employment Standards Act and Changing Workplaces Review.

The community forum was well attended and participants were vocal and engaged. At the event people shared their work experiences and we heard many compelling stories. Although the content of these stories differed many had the same theme; people reported being frustrated,



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scared, tired, and confused. They find the existing Employment Standards Act difficult to interpret and don't know where to turn for help when they encounter problems or have questions. A lot of the participants reported making minimum wage and/or being on a fixed income without any discretionary dollars to consult with or hire a lawyer. We learned that the Waterloo Region Community Legal Services does not fund employment standard claims, consequently many individuals accept their employment situations as 'status quo' and do not question or challenge their employers. We also heard stories of individuals going to work sick with pneumonia and/or sending their children to school sick because they do not get paid when they are not at work. Some of these same individuals were also afraid to call in sick because they were frightened they would lose their job and/or not have their contract renewed. Several contract workers reported working full-time for less pay for the same company for years but never being offered a permanent contract; this denied them the opportunity to accrue more than 4% vacation pay, contribute to a company pension plan, and have sick days. Women in the audience reported earning less than their male counterparts for equal jobs. This claim is substantiated by a new survey published by Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives citing that women earn just 66 percent of what men make in Kitchener-Waterloo.<sup>3</sup> The general consensus of the audience at the forum was that labour laws need to change in Ontario; they are hopeful that the consultations on *Changing Workplaces Review* will result in fair and reasonable changes that will be mutually beneficial for the employee and the employer.

The SPCCND is a recognized leader in promoting greater social and economic equity through research and community development. For 25 years we have provided unique and valuable services which have had a positive impact on our community. We are committed to



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building and strengthening community capacity. As a social planning council we support our community in their efforts to participate in this consultation process. We are supporting our community by making this submission to the Changing Workplaces review. As a result of our community forum on employment standards we believe the most pressing issues in our community (Region of Waterloo) are: low-wages, vacation pay, sick pay, precarious work, pay equity and gender wage gap, and temp agencies. The following is a list of our recommendations for changes:

1. Support decent wages and work conditions that uphold the economy. The current \$11 minimum wage is almost 17 percent (\$4 225) below the poverty line (Low Income Measure).<sup>4</sup> The minimum wage should bring workers out of poverty, not embed them in it. Studies show that when individuals have discretionary income they contribute to the local economy. The Ontario government should raise the provincial minimum wage to \$15 an hour, adjusted annually for inflation.
2. Increase paid vacation entitlement to three weeks per year. Currently only Ontario and Yukon limit vacation to two weeks of paid vacation, while all other jurisdictions in Canada have access to 3 weeks of vacation.<sup>5</sup>
3. All employees shall accrue a minimum of one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked. Employees will not accrue more than 52 hours of paid sick time a calendar year, unless otherwise set higher by the employer. (This works out to approximately seven paid sick days per year for an employee working 35 hours a week). Eliminate the requirement for medical notes.
4. Regulate the growth of part-time, temporary, and self-employed work. Regulate the renewal of contracts so that seniority translates into permanent job status.



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5. Equal pay for equal work regardless of gender. Additionally there should be no differential in pay, benefits and working conditions for workers who are doing the same work but are classified differently, such as part-time, contract, temporary or casual.
6. Changes to the ESA should ensure that temporary agency workers receive the same wages, benefits, and working conditions as permanent workers doing the same work as temporary workers.
7. Support workers in making employment standard claims. Develop a third party complaint program and protect workers from unjust dismissal when they try to enforce their ESA rights.

We are hopeful that this review will result in meaningful changes for the ESA and labour laws that close the gaps that create insecurity, low incomes and the deteriorating floor of rights for workers. We have been given the incredible opportunity to revise Ontario's labour laws and improve the Employment Standard Act that more accurately reflect our modern workplaces. We have done our part—we engaged our community, listened, submitted our comments and recommendations for your review. Now it's your turn—please do your part and make the much needed changes!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Terry".

Linda Terry  
Executive Director  
Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries



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## Endnotes

- 1 Low income is defined as 1.5 times the minimum wage. Leah Vosko, as quoted by Sara Mojtehdzadeh, “Ontario seeshike in underemployment, low-wage workers.” Toronto Star Tuesday February 17, 2015. <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/02/17/Ontario-seeshike-in-underemployment-low-wage-workers.html>
- 2 Before taxes. Updated StatsCan LIM tables: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/ref/dict/table-tableau/t-3-2-eng.cfm> . Based on StatsCan Ontario CPI tables: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/cpis01a-eng.htm>
- 3 Best and worst places for women in Canada, according to survey. Laurie Monsebraaten. Toronto Star Tuesday July 15, 2015. <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/07/14/best-and-worst-places-for-women-in-canada-according-to-survey.html>
- 4 Before taxes. Updated StatsCan LIM tables: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/ref/dict/table-tableau/t-3-2-eng.cfm> . Based on StatsCan Ontario CPI tables: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/cpis01a-eng.htm>
- 5 Fight for \$15 & Fairness. Changing workplaces review. A framework for questions outlined in the changing workplace review-guide to consultations. <http://www.workersactioncentre.org/press-room/policy-papers/>