

# West Neighbourhood House

## Submission re Changing Workplaces Review

West Neighbourhood House, formerly known as St. Christopher House, is pleased to be able to participate in the provincial consultation about the Employment Standards Act and Labour Relations Act.

We have a variety of experiences and perspectives to offer.

### 1. Workers in the Informal Economy

Funded by the Metcalf Foundation, we have conducted a series of in-depth interviews with workers in the informal economy, particularly in the bars/restaurants/hospitality sector and music/arts/entertainment sector but also some workers in construction/renovation as well as child-minding, etc.

Amongst the factors pulling people into work in the informal economy:

- the lack of jobs in the formal economy, especially for young adults with little previous employment and newcomers to Canada;
- uncertain or disputed immigration status;
- difficulty in the formal economy accepting people whose alternative lifestyle/appearance makes “regular” work difficult to find or uncomfortable and stressful (ie some LGBT community members, people with body art).

Amongst the factors pushing employers to hire workers “under the table”:

- consumers/customers who benefit from not paying HST;
- cost savings from not paying mandatory employment-related costs (MERCs) which are approximately 13% additional cost on top of wages;
- a flexible workforce that can be dismissed easily if business demand changes or if there are difficult relations with employees;
- matching other employers’ practices of using informal economy workers to remain competitive;

We are still developing and testing possible public policy solutions but amongst the ideas under consideration are:

- consumer protection public education about the risks of employing people in the informal economy (e.g. if your uninsured roofer getting cash from you accidentally burns your house down);
- education and trusted, safe advice for workers in the informal economy so they can make better informed decisions about filing income tax or not (ie most low-income informal economy workers would gain substantially by filing income tax returns); and
- increased inspection and enforcement for worker safety for all as recommended by the Workers Action Centre.

## **2. Pay for travel time between work-related activities**

Changing Workplaces is an apt title for your review. One of the most prominent workplaces changing is in the health sector with a significant move to home and community care, requiring highly mobile Personal Support Workers.

As one example of emerging issues in changing workplaces, the Ministry of Health recently provide funding for “wage enhancements” to Personal Support Services. However, this new funding was not allowed to cover those hours spent travelling between clients.

Travel time between clients is a significant cost and to allow employers to not cover it is unjust and ultimately counter-productive as these much-needed workers will choose to work elsewhere (ie nursing homes). We ask that you consider legislating paid travel time between work-related activities.

We would be pleased to continue to provide you with these ideas and more as we continue the Informal Economy project this fall and as we notice other emerging issues arise in our rapidly changing labour market.

September 18, 2015