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Parents For Better Beginnings
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Ontario's Community Health Centres

Mr. C. Michael Mitchell and Hon John C. Murray
Special Advisors
Changing Workplaces Review
ELCPB 400 University Ave., 12th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1T7
Email: CWR.SpecialAdvisors@ontario.ca
Fax: 416-326-7650

October 3rd, 2016

Re: Submission to the Changing Workplaces Review on the Interim Report

Dear Mr. C. Mitchell and Hon. John C. Murray:

Greetings from Regent Park Community Health Centre.

We are glad that the Ontario provincial government is organizing the Changing Workplaces Review and has appointed you as Special Advisors to this very important task. The Workplaces Review provides an unprecedented opportunity to address the root causes of precarious work and to ensure decent working conditions and a living wage.

Regent Park Community Health Centre (RPCHC) is a community based agency that has provided primary health care, health promotion and prevention services for over 40 years in the inner city neighbourhood of Regent Park, Toronto. This is a low income neighbourhood with 41% of the workforce in the sales and service occupations where precarious work, low wages and unfair employment practices predominate.

In the 2015 Report titled A Higher Standard, Block clearly points out that the proportion of workers earning minimum wages in Ontario has increased significantly from 2.4 % in 1997 to 12% in 2014. Similarly the share of workers making within $4 of the minimum wage, $15 in 2014, has increased by 48% during the same period. Furthermore, one out of two workers in Ontario do not have a 40 hour-a-week job and unpredictable working hours seems to be the norm for most low wage workers. Income insecurity, lack of a living wage, poor working conditions, job insecurity are significant determinants of health. We are witness to the devastating effects that precarious work and low wages have on the parents and children of the working poor.

We are calling on you to reject options that will introduce more precarity to Ontario's labour market and instead recommend a bold and comprehensive vision that uproots the structural sources of precarious employment. As you well know, we cannot expect to fix systemic labour market problems with band-aid solutions.

We are heartened that you have correctly identified changing business practices as a source of precarious work. We note that many of these practices stem from the many exemptions and loopholes that make it possible for employers to evade their responsibilities under the law. Accordingly, we need to close the gaps in legislation that contribute to precarious work and that, left unchecked, will continue to exert downward pressure on the wages and working conditions of all of us.

In addition to raising minimum standards for all workers, we must also reduce the barriers to collective bargaining that exclude most people in precarious work.

The Workers' Action Centre and Parkdale Community Legal Services have provided a full review of the Advisors' Interim Report and made recommendations to improve wages and working conditions. Our organization supports and endorses their submission, "Building Decent Jobs from the Ground Up."

Should you feel the necessity to contact me I can be reached at: 416-364-2261 x 2309, or at paulosg@regentparkchc.org.

Yours truly,

Paulos Gebreyesus

Executive Director