



Canadian Federation of University Women
ONTARIO COUNCIL



CFUW Ontario Council Response for the Ontario Pre-Budget Consultations

February 2, 2016

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The Honourable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z1

February 2, 2016

Re: Pre-Budget Consultations

Dear Minister Sousa

The Ontario Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women would like to respond to the Ontario pre-Budget Consultations. CFUW Ontario Council appreciates this opportunity to participate in these discussions. Each of the issues below expresses the viewpoint of CFUW Ontario Council having the same importance, as we work toward a society, where families and communities in Ontario are healthier and stronger.

Human Trafficking

Ontario Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women is deeply concerned about what appears to be a lack of coordinated effort by the provincial government to address the issue of Human Trafficking in Ontario.

Human trafficking, often described as modern-day slavery, is one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. This crime represents an insidious assault on the basic human rights of its victims, mostly women and children. Victims, deprived from normal lives, are compelled to provide their labour or sexual services through a variety of coercive practices which directly benefit their perpetrators.

Regarding the Province of Ontario

1. We have the largest number of domestic human trafficking prosecutions (including commercial sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage, the tip of the iceberg, given the covert, invisible nature of the crime).
2. We are home to the majority of foreign human trafficking victims recognized by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
3. Ontario has no Action Plan to combat Human Trafficking. (Whereas BC, Alberta and Manitoba does.)
4. In 2011, Ontario committed 1.95 million over 3 years (that is just 5 cents per capita per year), compared to Manitoba's \$10 million per year (\$10 per capita per year) to combat Human Trafficking across the province.

5. Ontario has no organized systems to assist victims, provide comprehensive training and support programs to front-line service providers, law enforcement and general public.
6. There is also the issue of Ontario's Child Welfare Legislation. We need to have the Child Welfare Mandate in Ontario increased to 18 years of age, bringing into line with other provinces.

Canadian girls and women (as well as boys and men), are at risk of being coerced into sexual exploitation, particularly those who are already marginalized in our society. Our youth, First Nations, Inuit, Metis, refugees and migrant workers are at increased risk.

Ontario Council CFUW asks that the provincial government develop and implement through consultations with stakeholders an Ontario-wide Action Plan to combat Human Trafficking that will include:

- Legislation to protect victims of human trafficking that is respectful of the human rights of trafficked persons, that it not penalize or criminalize trafficked persons.
- Provide immediate protection and access to supportive service for trafficked persons.
- Fund shelters for trafficked persons that are specific to the needs of trafficked persons.
- Provide and fund training for service providers, law enforcement.
- Open an Ontario Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons that can co-ordinate Ontario's response to human trafficking.
- Raise awareness and provide education on human trafficking for the general public.
- Build capacity in Ontario communities to address this crime.
- Provide the necessary funding for the sustainability of the all of the above.

Income Security

We ask that all Ontarians regardless of circumstance have access to a basic income, administered through the tax system, that will permit them to pay for the basic necessities of life, including safe housing, nutritious food and transportation. We realize that this type of income support, best known as a Basic Income Guarantee, is a long term goal and one that requires the cooperation of the federal government. Until this goal can be reached, the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB), a type of income guarantee for children living in low income families, has proven to be an effective means of reducing child poverty. The Strategy acknowledges that children are the most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. We are therefore pleased to see that the OCB will be increased and indexed to inflation. However we are very concerned that the Basic Needs Allowance of families on social assistance is reduced as the OCB increases so that many of these families are no further ahead financially. Policies that increase support on the one hand and reduce support on the other are counterproductive. We would like to see any future increases in the OCB leave all families of low income better off regardless of the source of their income.

Ontario Council CFUW recognizes that ORPP is a provincially sponsored CPP enhancement to ensure that the average Canadian has a basic income "living wage" when retired. CFUW Ontario Council recognizes the need for the enhancement of benefits within 'Pillar 2'. As defined in the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan: Key Design questions. This is of particular importance as a result of the federal government's lack of support for an enhancement of CPP to better provide for retired Canadians. Not all retirees have the

benefit of Pillar 3 income as a result of where they have worked and/or lack of sufficient savings. Our workforce today is more mobile than ever and many young people begin their careers much later than the previous generation. At minimum, we would expect the ORPP to be comparable to the CPP providing defined benefits, an income for life, indexed to inflation, with pooled investment risk

Dental and Health Benefits

We ask that all Ontarians have access to a basic dental and prescription medicine program that covers expenses necessary to maintain health. The expanded eligibility for dental benefits for children and youth in low income families will help improve access to these services. The next step should be to expand the program to all low income Ontarians. A recent report by the Canadian Academy of Health Scientists found there are significant income-related inequalities in oral health and inequity in access to oral health care. In addition to children who live in low income families, difficulties accessing oral health care are experienced by people with low incomes, workers without dental insurance, aboriginals, the elderly living in institutions, refugees and immigrants; those with disabilities; and people living in rural and remote regions.¹ Good oral health contributes to overall health necessary to maximize human potential.

We commend the promise to provide health benefits for children and youth in low-income families to ensure they have access to services that fall outside of publicly funded health care, including prescription drugs, vision care, mental health services and assistive devices. The next step should be to work with the federal government to expand the program to all Canadians. There are over three million Canadians who are uninsured or under-insured for prescription drugs. Workplace plans provide little security when jobs are lost or a worker retires. The plans vary widely and are administratively expensive and inefficient. A national pharmacare program could reduce administrative costs, improve drug safety and improve prescribing practices.² It would also benefit employers, allowing them to reduce health related benefit costs thus freeing up resources to hire additional workers.

Concern:

Employers who provide benefit plans, but exclude workers once they reach a certain age, usually 65

Retirement ages range from 55 to 65. But that age is rising. In 2012, the Government of Canada raised the age at which Canadians can claim OAS from 65 to 67. This has significant impact on older Canadians.

¹ Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, 2014. Improving access to oral health care for vulnerable people living in Canada. Accessed 14.09.2014 <http://www.caahs-acss.ca/improving-access-to-oral-health-care-for-vulnerable-people-living-in-canada-2/>

² Canadian Health Coalition, Campaign for a National Health Care Program. Accessed 14.09.2014 <http://pharmacarenow.ca/learn-more/the-case-for-pharmacare>

Even if the employee continues to work past 65, they do not receive benefits from their employer as the employer is not mandated to provide benefit programs for their employees. As a result these older employees are no longer entitled to medical, dental, ocular or other employee group benefits-only to those benefits mandated or managed by the federal government or the crown. This is true regardless of how much or how long they have contributed to their employer-sponsored benefit plans.

And:

The Ontario Employment Standards Act limits participation in benefit plans to employees “who are 18 or over but under 65” (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2014)

This Ontario Employment Standards Act (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2000) declares that every individual is equal before and under the law, has the right to protection and shall not be discriminated against including discrimination based on age.

The limiting of participation in benefits based on age needs to be addressed by removing “who are 18 or over but under 65”.

Early Learning and Child Care

We ask that all Ontario’s children have access to high quality publicly-funded child care. For many low income families employment and training opportunities depend on access to affordable child care. The increased investments in child care over the past several years have been helpful in mitigating the impacts of the implementation of full day kindergarten. Yet the majority of children in Ontario do not have access to licensed child care and for many families high quality care remains unaffordable. It is unclear at this point in time what the impact of the Child Care Modernization Act will be on affordability, accessibility and quality. The act aims to increase the number of licensed child care spaces by raising the number of children per caregiver in both centre based and home child care. Home care providers may be unwilling to take additional children. Research and experts agree that one of the key elements that determine the quality of an early childhood education and care program is the number of children per adult – the ratio. In addition to ratios, group size and working conditions have an impact on quality.³ Both increases in group size and the number of children per adult, negatively impact working conditions.

Ontario Council recognizes and appreciates the effort of the provincial government to close the wage gap between early childhood educators (ECEs) working in full-day kindergarten and those in the community by increasing the wages by \$2 an hour.

We urge the government to continue the enhanced funding for child care workers’ wages and to establish provincial guidelines for wages, benefits and working conditions for early learning and child care programs. In addition we recommend that the government require municipalities to

³ Child Care Resource and Research Unit, Briefing Note (2009): Ratios for four and five year olds: What does the research say? What else is important

implement policy to adopt regional wage scales for registered Early Childhood Educators working in regulated child care in order to reduce the disparity in wages among different sectors.

Our long range goal has always been universal day care. And with the announcement of the Federal government to move in this direction, we encourage the provincial government to work in partnership to make universal day care a reality.

Youth Leaving Care

We applaud the programs and funding outlined for former Crown Wards and youth leaving care. These programs – 100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care, Youth-in-Transition Worker Program and the Children and Youth in Care Innovative Program Pilots, are great steps that will help youth in care reach their potential. We also ask that the provincial government take measures that would provide youth age 16 and 17 who are at risk to access Children’s Aid services.

Water

CFUW Ontario Council has for many years been a strong advocate for the protection of our water. We were a member of the Great Lakes Annex Advisory Panel and we appreciated the professionalism of the MNR staff and the steps the Ministry took to listen to and to benefit from the advice of that multi-stakeholder group. We have also participated, as a member of the Advisory Panel, in the development of the Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario Waters Act, the Clean Water Act, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, and the Great Lakes Protection Act. We have strongly supported the actions of the Government of Ontario to date which have recognized the importance of our water sources and resources and the ecosystems that they support - and the need to more carefully protect them. We ask that necessary funding be provided to continue the protection of our water.

CFUW Ontario Council is composed of 54 clubs within Ontario, comprised of members living in urban and rural areas across Ontario. We are non-partisan, nonsectarian, a voluntary, self-funded, non-governmental organization. Our members are active in public affairs, advocating on public education, justice, health and environmental issues as well as the status of women and human rights. Ontario Council is part of the Canadian Federation of University Women which is the largest affiliate of the international organization.

Sincerely
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