

BPW Proposes a Strategy for Economic Equality Between the Sexes and to Eliminate the Wage Gap

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BPW Ontario's recent discussions and follow-up activities with various Ministers and key government stakeholders focus on how eliminating the Wage Gap can positively affect their specific portfolios while at the same time collaboratively provide a strategic economic advantage for Ontario through the 21st Century. Discussions emphasized that as our labour force shrinks and our population ages, the social and fiscal ramifications of sustained "economic inequities" between the sexes can expect to be magnified. If the Wage Gap remains unchecked, the social and economic fall-out that is a direct by-product of economic inequality such as, poverty, violence against women, rising health care and long-term care expenses, and a reduced productivity potential will diminish the standard of living for all of Ontario's citizens.

There are hopeful signs that the benefit of a coordinated fresh-eyes inter-ministerial approach to eliminating the wage gap that engages key stakeholders in changing societal attitudes and practices is gaining acceptance. The Ministers responsible for Women's Issues, Community and Social Service, Labour, Education, Economic Development, Health Care, the Attorney General, and Human Rights and Pay Equity Commissions, to list a few, can work together to advance economic equality between the sexes and eliminate the wage gap. A two day conference sponsored by the Ontario Pay Equity Commission entitled "**Women in the Workplace: Opening Doors-Closing the Gap**" **November 5th -6th, 2008 in Toronto** offers a tremendous opportunity to open the lines of communication between key stakeholders and build the foundation needed for an effective collaborative approach. BPW Ontario, through its resolutions, has long supported addressing pay inequities and is optimistic regarding the receptivity to exploring this issue beyond its traditional Pay Equity framework and will be an active participant in the round table discussions at this conference.

We know that despite 20 years of Pay Equity legislation, economic equality for women remains elusive as evidenced by the persistent Wage Gap. Regardless of occupation, age or education, on average women earn 71% of what men earn, while aboriginal women are worse off at 46 %, visible minorities at 64% and a very significant factor considering our aging population, retired female pensioners earn less than 58%.

We further accept that although, it was first thought that **Pay Equity** (a tool used to promote objective gender neutral job evaluation and pay, based upon effort, skill, responsibility and working conditions) would eliminate the wage gap, research today suggests that the **Wage Gap** is more complex than the under-valuation of women's work.

Simply put, this willingness to broaden the scope of activities beyond the original Pay Equity initiatives offers new hope for Ontario to address the economic inequities inherent in the wage gap and secure its economic viability for the 21st century.

Specifically, it is through a comprehensive and collaborative inter-ministerial approach that we will successfully address the underlying root cause of what research indicates are the three main contributors to the wage gap;

- 1. Family Responsibilities,**
- 2. Job/Industry Clustering of Working Women and**
- 3. Under-valuation of traditional Women's Work**

These three contributors outlined in the round table report "**Closing New Brunswick's Wage Gap: An Economic Imperative**" reinforce the importance of understanding the ingrained cultural attitudes sustaining these factors and the Wage Gap. It is making the wide ranging impact of the wage gap on the past, present and future reality for Ontarians transparent that strengthens our business case for building consensus for a coordinated strategy for economic equality. Due to our BPW member's thoughtful research and debate, the BPW Ontario delegation was able to present a strong case for how the Ontario government could benefit from the insights gained by other Nations and Provinces making strides in addressing the wage gap. Much has already been gained though our expressed willingness to work in partnership with the appropriate stakeholders to shape a comprehensive strategy that will propose a series of meaningful measures to change societal attitudes and address the three known contributors of the wage gap in Ontario. Check out the Pay Equity Website for more information on the November Pay Equity/Wage Gap Conference http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/peo/english/conf_docs.html , and to explore progress on the New Brunswick Wage Gap Project referenced in this article go to <http://www.gnb.ca/0012/Womens-Issues/wg-es/index-e.asp>

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