

**PRESENTATION TO THE
NEW BRUNSWICK LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LAW AMENDMENTS
BY
MENSWORK – VOIX D’HOMMES
REGARDING
BILL 77: PAY EQUITY ACT
Friday, November 26, 2004**

We thank the Standing Committee on Law Amendments for this opportunity to speak in regard to Bill 77: *Pay Equity Act*, which has been introduced in the Legislative Assembly during its current session.

We're here today on behalf of MensWork – Voix d'hommes, a province-wide network of men working with men to end violence against women. Our membership includes individuals from a range of professions and occupations from communities throughout New Brunswick. Most of our members also represent agencies and organizations mandated to respond to issues of domestic abuse, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence.

Our organization works to address a broad range of societal factors that contribute to violence against women. We stand in solidarity with women as they work to bring about the changes that are necessary to improve their personal and collective safety, security, quality of life and status in society.

This is why we are appearing before you today. We are here to voice our support for Bill 77. We would also like to use this forum to speak to the larger social context in which we find ourselves, and in which Bill 77 is but one aspect.

Let's begin by making the connection between gender-based economic discrimination and gender-based violence.

We know that a person's economic class—their degree of wealth and level of income—are primary determinants of how well they will do in life. Economic class normally predicts the degree of power, privilege, access, health and security a person will enjoy in life.

We know that women do not fare as well as men in our society in many ways, and this is most apparent when looking at women's reality through an economic lens.

We need look no further than the data contained in the comprehensive annual “report card” of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Status of Women to see that women as a group are economically second class citizens. Their work, both the unpaid work in the home and the paid work outside the home, is consistently under-valued and under-compensated.

Consider the reality of New Brunswick women during the past three years. In terms of pay gaps based on average hourly wages, women earned almost 20% less than what men did. Unionized women fared better, but still earned 93% of what their male colleagues did. Average annual earnings of women who work full-time all year were 28% less than men.

Education does not necessarily narrow these gaps. Female Community College and university graduates earned, respectively, 85.5% and 87% of what male graduates earned. Granted, different occupations and professions do not pay workers equally. However,

even when women and men were employed in the same occupation or profession following graduation, women frequently made less than their male colleagues. This is exacerbated by the fact that women continue to be under-represented in traditionally male occupations, occupations that often pay better than those traditionally employing women.

Over 2/3 of minimum wage workers in New Brunswick are adult females. At best, these workers can expect to earn somewhat less than \$13,000 per year even when employed full-time. This is only slightly more than a single parent with two children would receive through the provincial Income Assistance Program.

New Brunswick income assistance rates continue to be among the lowest in Canada. Again, women represent the majority of New Brunswickers receiving income assistance.

Welfare rates have been essentially unchanged since the mid-1990s. Although there have been commitments made by the government to review and increase these rates, we are still waiting for this to happen.

We know that the economic status of women in turn determines the economic well-being of children. Women continue to bear the primary responsibility for childcare in our society. The number of single parent families has increased, and most of these families are headed by women. Even in dual parent families, many families struggle to make ends meet even when both parents work outside the home. Regardless of family configuration, improving women's earnings will produce direct economic benefits for children. This is of particular urgency given Campaign 2000's recent annual report for 2004. The report sounded the warning that the number of children living in poverty in Canada has substantially increased despite a strong economy and record profits and surpluses for business and government.

We are not stating anything new here, but it needs to be said again until it is heard and acted upon: If society wants to improve children's chances for successful life outcomes, it must do a better job of ensuring the economic security and prosperity of women.

By assigning economic second class citizenship to women, society is sending girls and women two unspoken yet very clear messages:

First, that society considers women less important than men.

Second, that society expects women to assume a subordinate and dependent position in relation to men.

Those messages permeate the consciousness of boys and men as well, reinforcing the age-old attitude that men are superior to women, and more highly valued by society.

This attitude fuels a system based on male privilege and entitlement that ultimately affects every aspect of every social and personal relationship between men and women. This attitude manifests itself everywhere.

In popular culture and the media, we have just witnessed how women scored on a list of nominees for the title of “The Greatest Canadian”. Of the top 100 nominees, only 20% were women. On the Top Ten list, not a woman was to be found.

Within the workplace, the economy and the seat of government, women continue to be shut out of positions of power or bump up against “glass ceilings”. Male privilege and an archaic sense of the “natural order” continue to prop up “Old Boys Networks” that exclude women from prosperity and power while exploiting women’s labour and votes to maintain men in positions of prosperity and power.

If you are born male in our current system, there are many benefits:

- You will normally be encouraged to pursue education in professions that offer more status and economic advantages for men than for women;
- You will work in an environment where you will be normally be free from sexual harassment;
- You will enjoy higher pay and will perform less menial work;
- You will have greater opportunities for on-job training and more offers for career advancement;
- Pregnancy and child care considerations and constraints will not impede your career;
- You will not have to fight for enforcement of court ordered child support payments;
- You will be given more opportunities to take a leadership role in your workplace;
- All about you the popular culture and media will reinforce your sense of privilege by routinely displaying images of men in

positions of leadership, men being financially successful, men being portrayed as heroes, and men having the status of superstars in athletics;

- You will know that because you have money you can pay for sexual access to women in any city or region in this country or most any other country that you care to travel to;
- As you work and travel, your needs related to cooking, cleaning, clerical support and other essential services will be taken care of by women earning much less than you;
- Most of your clothes will have been made by underpaid women in this and other countries;
- Most of your technological gadgets will have been affordable because they have been produced by underpaid women in this and other countries;
- You will have a much easier time than women with similar qualifications when it comes to obtaining financial consideration in the form of mortgages, small business loans, agricultural loans or car loans; and

- Perhaps most important for you personally and socially, you will know that you can be safe, either in your home or while walking alone on the street at night. You will not require the services of a Transition House or a Sexual Assault Crisis Centre.

Indeed, we see the harshest impact of male privilege manifested in the cold statistics of sexual assault, domestic abuse and spousal homicide.

Women are not willing victims in these situations. Yet, due to economic constraints, they are often trapped in situations where they see no option but to stay in abusive relationships. They know that after a month at a women's shelter, they will not have the economic wherewithal to make a new, independent life for themselves and their children. They often have no alternative than to return to a situation of dependency and abuse.

It has been said that poverty is the greatest form of violence.

Dismantling the systemic economic oppression of women will do much to address poverty and violence in its many forms. Saying no to the social acceptance of second class citizenship for women will send a message that will counter the current assumptions of male privilege. Only when that assumption is successfully challenged and rejected will fundamental justice and equality for women prevail.

In 1919, when women in New Brunswick won the right to vote, a ripple effect was created that ran with increasing strength through the 20th century, the result being significant social advances for women. Eighty-five years later, and at the beginning of a new century, it is time to do the right thing. In fact, the time is long overdue. Enfranchise women economically as well as politically.

We do not suggest that Bill 77 will address the many complex problems we have noted in this presentation. We are aware that Bill 77 is but one step in this process. Even so, it is an important step which must be taken. It will revitalize, renew and expand the effort to achieve pay equity which began in 1989 and stalled soon after. We support the passage of Bill 77 and encourage the Members of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly—a body largely made up of men—to do the same.

Your passage of Bill 77 will demonstrate leadership and will send a clear message that economic second class citizenship for women will not be tolerated in New Brunswick. It will also create momentum for other important economic steps which need to be taken, steps such as improved support for women's labour force participation, including training and child care services; increased minimum wage and income assistance levels; and greater transitional support out of poverty and abusive relationships.

Last year, in partnership with the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, our organization supported a poster campaign urging men to speak out against all forms of violence and disrespect. We were pleased that a number of provincial leaders, including the Premier and Lieutenant Governor, offered to appear on that poster. We are calling on the men in the Legislative Assembly to take up the challenge posed by the Premier and Lieutenant Governor. Pass Bill 77. Show respect for the value of work performed by women in New Brunswick. Do your part to create a better world for women.

Thank you.

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