

A brief supplementing testimony to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Economic security of women in Canada ^[1]

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Introduction

Thank you for the invitation to appear today and provide information on this important matter. Improving women's economic security and ensuring their equal participation in the Canadian economy is not a trivial matter. These goals are central to reducing poverty for women and children; for enabling women to fully utilize their talents, education and experience; and for maintaining and growing the Canadian economy, given a shrinking and aging labour force. Moreover, these goals are central to Canada's commitments to gender equality and fairness as social and economic rights, including commitments made as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Addressing the structural factors that lead to and perpetuate gender inequality requires a multi-pronged, comprehensive approach involving leadership at the federal level, and cooperation and collaboration with provinces and territories and non-governmental stakeholders. The recently completed report by the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) provides strong arguments for addressing such issues as inadequate social programs; limited access to Legal Aid; Inequities in women's employment, including the importance of effective pay equity provisions; violence against women; barriers to education; and restricted access to health care. This multifaceted agenda can appear daunting in scope and magnitude, and will require concerted, sustained actions that are designed to achieve specific outcomes that are measurable and clear, informed by research and best practices.

There are positive steps that this government has taken and has committed itself to that are important to recognize. These include the appointment of a gender-equal cabinet, the re-instatement of the long-form census and the Court Challenges program, gender-based analysis of the federal budget, and a commitment to effective pay equity policies. In addition, the improved Canada Child Benefit is an important policy achievement, one that will directly affect the lives of many families.

Today, I will focus my remarks on inequalities that stem from women's caring labour – issues that stem from women's roles in their families as the main caregivers of children, the disabled, and the elderly that affect women's employment and career advancement, their health, and their financial resources. The challenges that women face can be addressed by improved policies, more workplace flexibility, and more adequate access to child care and home care services. The material I am presenting is based on research, including my own, and my observations of these matters over a 40-year career that has included participation in task forces, expert panels and planning committees.

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