

Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs regarding Bill 148: Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is the professional association for early childhood educators (ECEs) in Ontario. We support ECEs in their professional practice and advocate for the recognition and appropriate compensation that early childhood professionals need so that they can provide high quality programs for children and families. Well educated, well paid and competent early childhood educators are fundamental to high quality early years and child care programs that support children and families across the province. Our members work throughout Ontario in programs for young children and their families, including licensed centre based and home based child care, full-day kindergarten, family resource programs, Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres and as Resource Consultants who provide services and support for children and families with disabilities.

ECEs and early years staff have joined working people across Ontario to make it loud and clear that too many of us are working for low wages in part-time, temporary or contract jobs without employment benefits, workplace protection or the right to form, and keep, a union. For too many Ontario workers, full time work does not guarantee a life above the poverty line. Income and job insecurity keep us from making ends meet. Even with the professionalization of ECEs and the mounting evidence pointing to the immense importance of their work, ECEs have seen a very slow and limited increase in professional recognition through improved compensation and benefits. Low ECE salaries, inconsistent working conditions, and precarious work schedules have resulted in poor morale, job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. Particularly in licensed child care programs, ECEs are transitioning over to full-day kindergarten, or worse, are leaving the sector altogether despite being passionate about their work. It is the experience of many early years and child care programs across Ontario that qualified ECEs cannot be recruited to work in these under-resourced early childhood environments that serve our youngest children. This is having a significant impact on child care staff consistency, program quality, and sector stability that promises to endure for years if it is not addressed now.

- 24% of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) and 67% of other program staff working in licensed child care earn less than \$15/hr^[1].
- Many ECE professionals are choosing to leave the sector entirely, despite being passionate about their work due to low wages, inconsistent working conditions, high turnover, and job dissatisfaction that plague the early years and child care sector in Ontario.
- RECEs working in Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres and other family support programs that currently make less than \$15 an hour and do not receive the government's Wage Enhancement Grant will finally get a raise with the transition to a \$15 min wage.
- Low wage and precarious work that keeps families and children living in poverty can have a devastating effect on young children during their most formative years.

While Bill 148 is a critical first step to addressing these workforce issues in the early years and child care sector, the government of Ontario still must address the root of the child care crisis: wages cannot be tied to parent fees and affordable high quality child care cannot be provided through the market.

The Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017 (Bill 148) introduces many important changes to address Ontario's outdated labour laws. The proposed changes in Bill 148 to the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and Labour Relations Act (LRA) provide a good start to addressing precarious work to deal with changing workplace practices.

However, we are calling for amendments to Bill 148 to ensure it can close the gaps and raise the floor of minimum standards for the highest possible number of workers in Ontario.

Millions of workers (and their families) in this province are waiting to see how your committee will pave the way to strengthen our archaic labour laws. We are calling on you to reject suggestions that will make work more precarious, under the guise of enabling flexibility for the kind of business practices that continue to exert downward pressure on the wages and working conditions of all of us.

The bulk of evidence shows that decent work is the foundation of a strong economy, better health outcomes, and reduced inequality. We disagree with those who suggest otherwise.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario fully supports the recommendations and amendments put forward in the submissions by the Workers' Action Centre and Parkdale Community Legal Services, Decent Work and Health Network, Migrant Workers' Alliance for Change, Injured Workers' Consultants Community Legal Clinic and the Ontario Federation of Labour as part of the Fight for \$15 and Fairness.

[1]Ministry of Education (2016). 2015 Licensed Child Care Operators Survey Report

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: social policy ^[4]

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