

Ontario to bring in 'pay transparency' bill that aims to close gender wage gap ^[1]

Author: Rushowy, Kristin

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Saying efforts to narrow the gender wage gap are not working, the Ontario government will soon force firms to disclose salary ranges in jobs ads and also report to the province what they pay their employees.

In legislation aimed at lowering a difference that is as high as 30 per cent in some sectors — a figure that has not budged in the last decade — the Ontario government plans to have business track wages and break them down by gender and diversity to help rectify what the labour minister called a reality that's "simply unfair to women."

"We have a 29 per cent gender wage gap in the province of Ontario — despite other attempts at trying to solve that issue ... we are not making the progress that we need to make sure that women are an equal partner, are empowered in the economy, are earning the same as men," Kevin Flynn told reporters Tuesday.

"... We've got some of the best pay equity legislation in the world, our enforcement isn't perhaps what it should be, and we've asked business to come along on a voluntary basis, we've asked them to comply with the number of women on boards, in leadership roles — and it just isn't working," he added. "We need something a lot more firm than that."

Based on legislation in Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom, the Ontario proposal — a first in Canada — should help narrow the gap to about 15 or 16 per cent, he said.

"It's a change that's long, long overdue," added Flynn. "Whether you are a big business or a small business, women in this province really deserve better."

Critics wondered why the Liberals, in power for 15 years, are only now taking action.

"If it were a priority for Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals, they would have already done it," said NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, adding that Liberals "have not even been able to ensure pay equity within the government."

"Sadly, they have not, and today's announcement does not improve the pay equity outlook for Ontario's women," Horwath said. "In fact, experts are saying Kathleen Wynne's desperate attempt to win votes before the June provincial election is actually a step back for women in Ontario."

The NDP's Cindy Forster (Welland) called it "weak legislation."

The move, announced by Premier Wynne earlier Tuesday — two days before International Women's Day — means job candidates will have information about compensation when applying for and accepting jobs.

It's part of a broader, \$50 million three-year plan that will ban employers from asking potential workers about what they've earned in the past, and report publicly on wages.

"We've got to pay attention to the reality of women's lives," Wynne said. "They still are not paid the same as men are paid. They still, at a very young age, have their horizons limited. We have got to stop doing that to them."

The funding will also go towards job skills training and supports at women's centres, boosting mentorship and entrepreneurship.

The proposed rules will at first be applied to the Ontario Public Service, then to companies with 500-plus employees, followed by firms with 250-plus workers.

The legislation is expected to pass before the writ drops in May, and will come into force in January 2019. Businesses that don't comply could face fines.

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