

Feds introduce pay equity legislation ^[1]

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Source: Benefits Canada

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Oct 2018

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

A week after publishing the results of a consultation on the topic ^[3], the federal government is introducing pay equity legislation for federally regulated workplaces.

Under the pay equity regime, employers will be required to examine their compensation practices to ensure women who work in federally regulated workplaces receive equal pay for work of equal value. This includes the federal private sector, the federal public service, parliamentary workplaces and ministers' offices.

As well, the government will appoint a pay equity commissioner, who will play both education and enforcement roles with regards to the legislation. The commissioner will be responsible for helping people understand their rights and obligations under the new act and facilitating the resolution of disputes related to pay equity. The commissioner will have a range of enforcement tools, including the power to initiate audits, conduct investigations and issue orders and administrative monetary penalties.

"Proactive pay equity is not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do," said Patty Hajdu, minister of employment, workforce development and labour, in a press release. "The bottom line is that when people are treated fairly and are given an equal opportunity to succeed and to reach their full potential, we all benefit."

Maryam Monsef, the minister of status of women, called the legislation an historic step to advance gender equality and help eliminate the gender wage gap.

"Proactive pay equity for federally regulated employees, along with investments our government has made in quality child care, affordable housing and poverty reduction, as well as measures we have brought in to create more flexible work arrangements, promote more women in STEM fields, the trades and entrepreneurship, and ensure zero tolerance for workplace harassment and violence, will increase women's financial security, grow the middle class and strengthen our economy so that all Canadians benefit."

Unions weighing in on the legislation praised the government's initiative but highlighted certain issues with the bill. "This is a great achievement for the women's movement in Canada and the allies who fought for decades to right this historical wrong," said Mark Hancock, national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, in a press release. "There is room for improvement in this legislation, but we give credit to Minister Hajdu and look forward to working with her to make bill C-86 even better."

Specifically CUPE noted that it will take several years before the legislation will be in full effect and the government should speed up that process. As well, it noted the bill gives too much leeway to employers and it would like to see stronger language in favour of the employee.

Unifor also applauded the legislation and noted, in particular, that while non-discriminatory compensation schemes are already the law, the new bill puts the onus on the employer to ensure compliance, as opposed to workers needing to complain to bring inequities to light.

"Equal pay for work of equal value, which is at the heart of this proposed legislation, should be the goal of all employers," said Lisa Kelly, director of the women's department at Unifor. "While this is an important protection for women in the workforce, to close the gender wage gap we need to address other barriers as well, such as the lack of universal child care and equal access to good jobs. We also need to ensure we are considering the diversity of all genders and including intersectionality in our approach."

Related link: Pay equity consultations - What we heard report ^[4]

Region: Canada ^[5]

Tags: pay equity ^[6]

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