

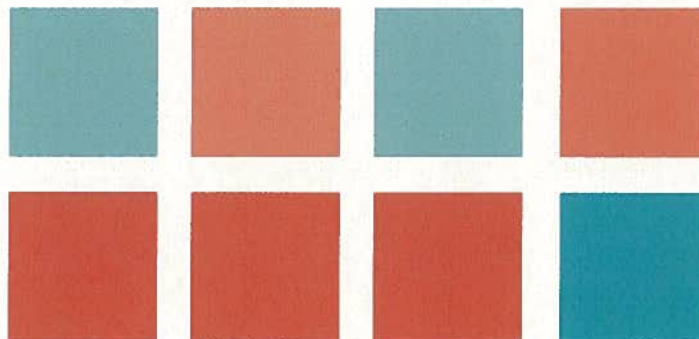


Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)

Submission to: the Standing Committee on General
Government

*Bill 18, An Act to amend various statutes with respect
to employment and labour*

October 30, 2014



Bill 18, *An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour*

Submission to the Standing Committee on General Government
October 30, 2014

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association for registered nurses who practise in all roles and sectors across Ontario.

RNAO appreciates the opportunity to present this submission on Bill 18, *An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour* to the Standing Committee on General Government. However, the precipitous movement of Bill 18 from Second Reading on October 29, 2014¹ to the deadline for submissions to this committee by 3:00 pm on October 30, 2014² did not permit us to prepare an oral submission or a more detailed written submission. **Moving forward, it would be helpful if Committees ensured sufficient time for Ontarians to be able to provide thoughtful feedback both to strengthen legislation and the democratic process.**

There is compelling evidence in Ontario,^{3 4 5} Canada,⁶ and across the globe⁷ that decent employment with fair wages and working conditions are important drivers of individual, family, and community health. In order to help build a "fairer and healthier Ontario,"⁸ it is critical that Bill 18 be strengthened and passed.

The RNAO supports strengthening Bill 18 by implementation of the following recommendations:

1. Amend Bill 18 so that temporary employment agencies and the client company where workers are assigned are jointly responsible for all rights under the *Employment Standards Act*.
2. Amend Bill 18 to remove the six-months implementation delay on removing the \$10,000 cap on unpaid wages recoverable under the *Employment Standards Act* and on extending the claims period to two years. Workers should not have to endure a delay of six months before they can claim for the full amount of wages that they are owed.
3. Increase the minimum wage to \$14 per hour in the next budget. RNAO supports the widespread community call to bring those working at least 35-hours per week at minimum wage at least 10 per cent above the poverty line as a step toward a living wage.

For more information on the evidence and rationale of the first two recommendations, we recommend resources from the Workers Action Centre.^{9 10} RNAO's arguments to support increasing the minimum wage are attached as follows:

- RNAO submission to Minimum Wage Advisory Panel: Increase the minimum wage so that work is a pathway out of poverty, October 2013¹¹
- RNAO letter to Premier, January 27, 2014¹²
- RNAO letter to Premier, February 26, 2014¹³

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on Bill 18 to the Standing Committee on General Government. Please contact us if you have any questions about this submission or would like more information.

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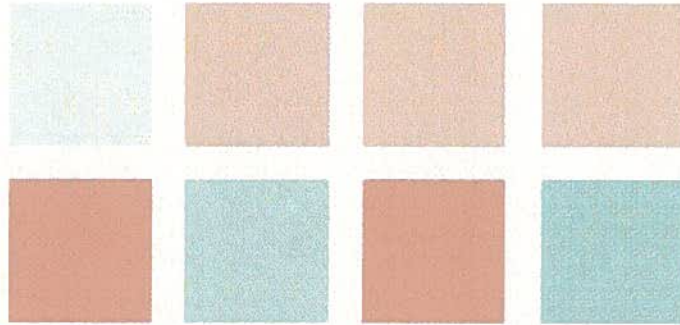
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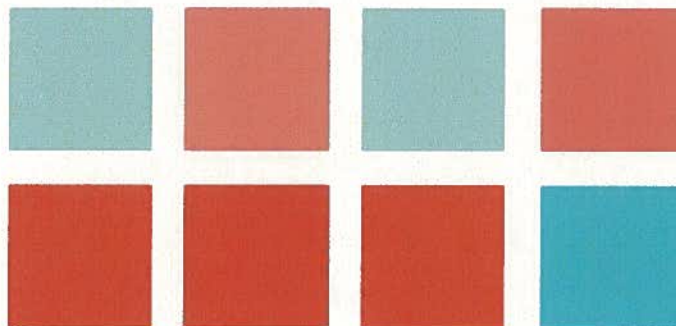
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**Submission to the Minimum Wage
Advisory Panel: Increase the minimum
wage so that work is a pathway out of
poverty**

October 18, 2013

**The Registered Nurses' Association of
Ontario (RNAO)**



The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association representing nurses, in all settings and roles across Ontario. It is the strong credible voice leading the nursing profession to influence and promote healthy public policy.

As RNAO stated in two recent open letters to Premier Wynne,^{1 2} Ontario's nurses implore the government to accelerate poverty reduction efforts so that all Ontarians can have a fair chance at good health and well-being. The evidence is compelling that alleviating poverty is important economic, social, and health policy in that health inequities are caused by social inequities. As an example, it is completely unacceptable that in a province as affluent as Ontario that there could be a twenty-one year difference in life expectancy in the five kilometer distance between a high-income and a low-income neighbourhood in Hamilton.^{3 4} Decades of cumulative evidence compiled by the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health⁵ make it clear that the key to reducing avoidable and unnecessary premature deaths is inexorably linked with reducing poverty and income inequality. There is an international consensus based on public health science and human rights legislation that "governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples, which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures."^{6 7} Raising the minimum wage so that full-time work becomes a pathway out of poverty is integral to implementing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy so that all Ontarians can live in health and dignity.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario supports the broad-based community movement calling for an increase of the minimum wage to 10 per cent above the Low Income Measure (LIM) or \$14 per hour in 2013 and then automatically index it annually to the rate of inflation.^{8 9}

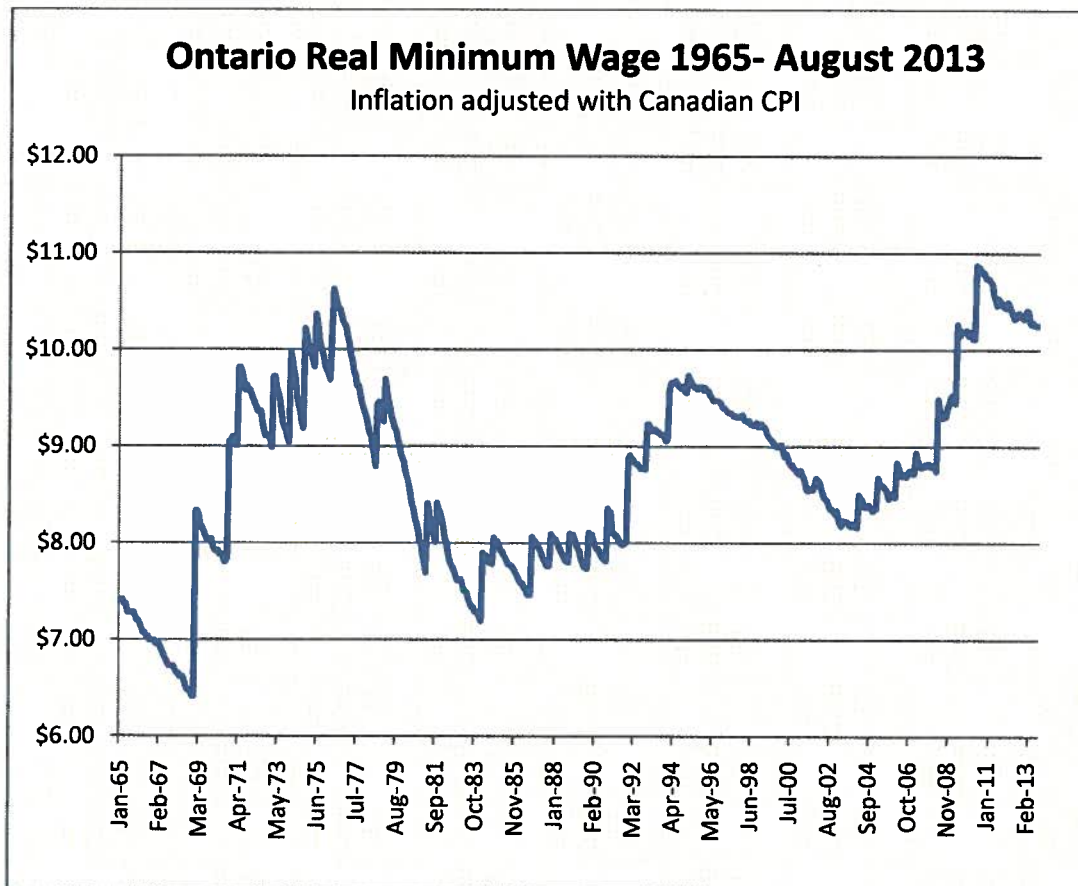
The minimum wage was frozen at \$6.85 per hour from 1995 to 2004, corresponding to a 17 per cent cut in purchasing power. After that, important increases brought it to \$10.25. The table below shows the recent progression in minimum wage rates in Ontario.

1

RNAO Submission to the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel: Increase the minimum wage so that work is a pathway out of poverty
October 18, 2013

Ontario Minimum Wage	
Date of Change	Rate
01-Jan-1995	\$6.85
01-Feb-2004	\$7.15
01-Feb-2005	\$7.45
01-Feb-2006	\$7.75
01-Feb-2007	\$8.00
31-Mar-2008	\$8.75
31-Mar-2009	\$9.50
31-Mar-2010	\$10.25

The situation for workers earning minimum wage is not so rosy once adjusted for inflation as the chart below demonstrates:



With the minimum wage frozen at \$10.25 per hour since 2010, the real minimum wage has started to decrease as shown above. Over the last three years, inflation has driven down the minimum wage earnings 19 per cent below the poverty line (using the LIM).¹⁰

Except for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, Ontario's workforce is more reliant on minimum wage than any other part of Canada.¹¹ Minimum wage workers account for almost one in ten employees in Ontario, which is more than double the share compared with a decade ago.¹² Of the 464,000 employees paid at minimum wage in Ontario in 2011, women, racialized people, and recent immigrants are disproportionately more likely to be working for minimum wage.¹³

Wages that cause individuals and families to live in poverty not only harm those directly involved but also displace costs from corporations to the public sector. A newly released study in the United States found that 52 per cent¹⁴ of front-line fast food workers "earn so little they must rely on public assistance to get by."¹⁵ A conservative estimate of the cost of publicly funded social safety programs provided by government to augment low-wage jobs in the fast-food industry in the United States comes to \$7 billion per year.¹⁶ In the context of the American fast-food industry generating sales of \$200 billion per year, Jack Temple of the National Employment Law Project notes: "It doesn't matter whether you work or shop at McDonald's or not, the low-wage business model is expensive for everybody. Companies...are basically pushing off part of their costs on the taxpayers."¹⁷

While the potential employment effects of increasing minimum wage has been contested in the academic literature, two meta-studies analyzing research on the minimum wage since the early 1990's concluded that "the minimum wage has little or no discernable effect on the employment prospects of low-wage workers."¹⁸ One can find studies that conclude negative employment effects, but even if correct, the magnitude of the claimed effects is small and readily outweighed by the much larger income effects. In fact, a study of the impact of "business assistance living wage laws," which require businesses receiving public subsidies to pay workers above the poverty level, found that 15 cities effectively implementing these laws had the same levels of employment growth as a comparable group of control cities.¹⁹

An analysis of the economic impact of higher wages for Walmart workers found a tremendous benefit for workers living in poverty and near-poverty with only a modest impact on shoppers. Even if Walmart were to pass 100 per cent of wage increases onto consumers, the average impact would be only 1.1 per cent of prices, which works out to 46 cents per shopping trip.²⁰ While the Walmart shoppers would spend an additional \$12.49 per year, low-income Walmart workers would see a raise of \$1,670 to \$6,500 per year.²¹

Counter to the claim that raising the minimum wage would hurt employment or low-income shoppers is the more compelling argument that raising the minimum wage would be good for everyone. As 54 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product is due to household spending, businesses will benefit from increased consumer demand and governments will increase revenues from economic growth.²² Unlike corporations that are hoarding their cash reserves as "dead money" up by \$72 billion in 2011,²³ the bottom 20 per cent of people tend to spend 60 per cent of their income on frills such as housing, food, and clothes.²⁴ More generally, low income people tend to spend almost all of their income, so any increase in their income goes overwhelmingly into buying goods and services, thus creating more jobs than created by increases at the top of the income scale.

While a minimum wage of \$14 per hour which is then indexed to inflation annually is a good start, an actual living wage would be even better for stronger, more inclusive, and democratic communities.²⁵ Estimates of a 2012 living wage for Kingston have been set at \$16.51 per hour and \$17.87 per hour for Toronto,²⁶ while an updated living wage for Vancouver has been calculated at \$19.62 per hour for 2013.²⁷

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in collective conversation and work to build a healthier, more equitable, and vibrant province.

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- ¹⁶ Allegretto, Doussard, Graham-Squire, et al., 1.
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RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

RAISE MINIMUM WAGE TO \$14 PER HOUR OPEN LETTER FROM ONTARIO'S RNs TO PREMIER KATHLEEN WYNNE

January 27, 2014

Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Room 281
Main Legislative Building
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

Ontario's nurses urge you to increase the minimum wage in the next provincial budget, to \$14.00 per hour.

The minimum wage has been frozen, since 2010, at \$10.25 per hour. Nurses know this has had a serious, negative impact on minimum wage workers in Ontario. With rising cost of food, rent and electricity, a worker employed full-time on the minimum wage, now has an income that is 19 per cent below the poverty line. It is unacceptable to us that someone working hard at 40 hours a week, on minimum wage, should still be living in poverty in a province as affluent as Ontario. The province's 534,000 minimum wage workers deserve much better.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) has a long and proud history of supporting increases in the minimum wage as a means of ensuring paid work is a pathway out of poverty. As nurses, we witness in our day-to-day work the indisputable link between poverty and ill-health, and we know that a living wage for minimum wage workers is sound healthy public policy. Indeed, an investment in Ontario's low wage workers is a positive and strategic investment in the health and well-being for the province as a whole.

Low income has also a huge impact on health outcomes and overall well-being. A study of health outcomes in Hamilton neighbourhoods revealed a 21-year difference in life expectancy between a high-income and a low-income neighbourhood that were five kilometres apart. This reality cannot be ignored as it comes at a high cost to Ontarians in the form of increased health problems, more emergency room visits, as well as higher hospital admission and re-admission rates.

Premier, the next provincial budget must include an increase in the minimum wage. We join the broad-based community movement, which is calling on you to raise the minimum wage to



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

\$14.00 per hour and index it to the rate of inflation. It's time for our government to make a real difference in the lives of minimum wage workers.

Warm regards

Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT.
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

Rhonda Seidman-Carlson, RN, MN
President, RNAO

cc. Hon. Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance
Hon. Deb Matthews, Minister of Health & Long-Term Care
Hon. Ted McMeekin, Minister of Community & Social Services
Tim Hudak, Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party
Andrea Horwath, Leader of the New Democratic Party



RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

February 26, 2014

Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Premier of Ontario
Room #281
Main Legislative Building
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Wynne,

Thank you very much for your response to our request from January 27th, to raise the minimum wage rate in the next provincial budget to \$14 per hour.

We acknowledge that your announced increase of the general minimum wage to \$11 per hour effective on June 1, 2014 is a helpful first step. The increase was calculated to restore the minimum wage to the real level it had when it was last raised on March 31, 2010, based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). RNAO also appreciates your commitment to introducing legislation that would tie further minimum wage increases to annual changes in the inflation rate to ensure that the minimum wage keeps up with the cost of living. We ask you to ensure the relevant price index be used to make minimum wage adjustments; as Carol Goar pointed out in a February 4 column in the *Toronto Star*, prices of necessities have been rising at a higher rate than the overall constituents of the CPI. We urge that the government develop a consumer price index for minimum wage workers, and use that for any automatic adjustments in the minimum wage rate. That index should be applied to the June 1 adjustment as well.

We also support your intention to act on the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel's recommendation to undertake a review of the minimum wage be taken every five years.

While these signs of progress are welcome, a 75 cent per hour increase after a four-year freeze will not retroactively restore the purchasing power cumulatively lost over the last four years. Restoring the minimum wage to its real March 31, 2010 level, and then periodically restoring it to that level with annual inflationary adjustment, still leaves too many Ontarians working full-time for wages that are grossly inadequate to sustain health and dignity. As women, racialized people, and new immigrants are disproportionately more likely to be working for minimum wage, low-waged and precarious employment is another mechanism causing the feminization and racialization of poverty.

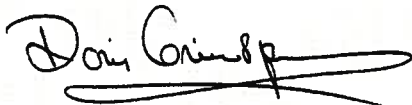
The Minimum Wage Advisory Panel found it to be outside of their scope to address the critical question of what an adequate minimum wage level should be. RNAO is among the many civil society groups and health-care organizations that believe a minimum wage should be a pathway out of poverty. The Association of Ontario Health Centres, Association of Ontario Midwives, Canadian Association of Community Health Centres, Health Providers Against Poverty, Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry, and RNAO support the call for a \$14/hour minimum wage which is 10 percent above the Low Income Measure (LIM). Raising the minimum wage to \$11/hour helps, but it still leaves recipients about

14 percent below the LIM. We believe that it is not acceptable for people to work full-time and still fall below the LIM.

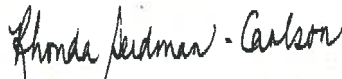
If the minimum wage is only to rise to \$11 on June 1, 2014, then it will have effectively been restored to the value it held four years earlier, assuming that the CPI reflects costs experience by minimum wage workers. An actual living wage has been estimated to be \$16.51 per hour for Kingston and \$17.87 per hour for Toronto in 2012. David Olive of the *Toronto Star* recently pointed out that higher wages are needed both to boost an economic recovery and to lessen the costs of financing social safety nets caused by "sweatshop pay." Olive points out that Denmark has been cited by the World Bank as Europe's "easiest place to do business for three years running" and Denmark's minimum wage is about \$20 per hour.

RNAO continues to support the broad-based community movement to increase the minimum wage 10 percent above the LIM in the next provincial budget. Failing that, March 31, 2015 is a date to mark five years since the last minimum wage raise and could be celebrated with a minimum wage 10 percent above the LIM, which is then indexed annually to inflation. Doing so is integral to fulfilling the promise of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, improving the health and lives of those who are marginalized, and bolstering Ontario's economic recovery through increased consumer spending.

Warm regards,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT.
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO



Rhonda Seidman-Carlson, RN, MN
President, RNAO

cc. Hon. Charles Sousa, Minister of Finance
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