

March 15, 2017

Status of Women Committee

RE: Economic Security of Women in Canada

Dear Erica Pereira,

We are participants in a girls' and young women's leadership and media literacy program called the Village Bloggurls at North York Community House [www.nych.ca](http://www.nych.ca). Our group consists of young girls and women aged 9-18, and our goal is to challenge ideas and address issues that matter to us through media production. Last year, we created a zine called "Reimagining the Future" in which we envisioned a world that would be fair and equitable for all women and girls. The first page of the zine is about the 'pink tax' and the gender wage gap. Even though most of us are not legally allowed to work, we know that women who can such as those in our lives who take care of us are not being paid fairly for a number of reasons.

Women living with mental and physical disabilities are affected by income inequality. According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) Report on Equality Rights of People with Disabilities 13.7% of Canadians live with a disability. This affects their employment because employers think that they're incapable of doing the job. Requirements to do heavy lifting, stand on your feet for several hours or to work in a fast paced environment exclude people with different abilities. Why can't the job adjust to the person to promote equity, instead of the person who can't change who they are adjusting to the job?

Unfortunately, differences in physical and mental abilities are seen as costly burdens instead of opportunities to be more inclusive. According to the CHRC Report, workplace environments are not usually equipped to suit the needs of someone with a disability because the employers believe it will cost too much and so not worth the [financial] investment. So many of these tall buildings with wealthy managers, directors and CEOs work in spaces wheelchair users could not navigate or access because the space is too cluttered and there no ramps. Women's income becomes affected because we aren't even given the chance.

According to CAMH, 1/5 Canadians suffer from mental health issues. Some of these Canadians are girls and women who live in our community. Accessing services for mental health is very difficult because there is barely anything nearby and affordable for us to access. So many of us are stressed out from family responsibilities (yes, even at our age) and school work, which increases as we get older. What would be helpful for many girls and women our age are mental health services within our workplaces when we become of age to work. As for right now, this is non-existent, even in our schools.

In our group, we discuss media representations and how they impact us as girls and women of colour. One thing that we always talk about is how stereotypes and negative images impact how we see ourselves. On several TV shows that are about women of influence or about teenage girls at the centre of a story, girls and women of colour are often the sidekicks or completely invisible. When we don't see ourselves, we don't think it's possible for us to do and

be the people we admire on TV. That might not have a direct effect on how much women of colour are making, but it has a direct effect on where women of colour think they will succeed.

Race plays a huge factor in how much women of colour make compared to everyone else. Whether we like it or not, racism is alive and well in our country called Canada. There are many stories of women of colour being punished for wearing their hair naturally, practicing their culture or having an accent. As a result of not getting the job over and over again, women are working so hard to stay out of poverty.

As young people, race and class already intersect and impact the kind of work we want to do. If any one of us wants to be a doctor, we know that we have to go to medical school, which costs more than our parents can afford. Even though it would be a dream for many of our parents, it would be full of debt that would take several years to pay off. Some of us are trying to find work, but it becomes hard to compete with those who can afford higher education. We're told to go to school so that we can get higher paying jobs, but is that even the reality today?

We recommend the following changes to increase the economic security of women in Canada:

- Fund more girls-centred programming which supports getting job ready skills and job experience
- Make wheelchair accessibility a part of workplace inspections
- Have mental health services available in work spaces and organizations that especially hire young girls and women
- Create advertisements and commercials that empower and encourage girls to think anything is possible
- Create more grants which specifically support girls and women of colour in their pursuit of education

Thank you for your commitment to improving the status of women economic security and leadership in Canada.

Sincerely,

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