

Brief on the Study of Bill C-12

Prepared for the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

By Mothers Step In, because we love our children

Co-signatories and representatives of Mothers Step In from Quebec and elsewhere:

Kathy Bouffard, Mothers Step In – Abitibi-Ouest
Christine Porlier, Mothers Step In – Baie-des-Chaleurs
Isabelle Dupras, Mothers Step In – Brome-Missisquoi
Marie-Hélène Blais, Mothers Step In – Drummond RCM
Johanne Saucier, Mothers Step In – Érable et Bois-Francs
Sarah Chamberland, Mothers Step In – Halifax
Céline Poissant, Mothers Step In – Joliette-Lanaudière
Lysanne Villemure, Mothers Step In – Laurentides
Marie-Claude Brouillette, Mothers Step In – Les Moulins
Mylène Fortin, Mothers Step In – Matane
Geneviève Rajotte Sauriol, Mothers Step In – Maskinongé RCM
Clélia Sève and Laure Waridel, Mothers Step In – Montreal
Emmanuelle Larocque, Mothers Step In – Prescott-Russell
Nicole Gagné, Mothers Step In – Quebec City
Catherine Aubin, Mothers Step In – Rimouski-Neigette
Sophie Morin, Mothers Step In – South Shore
Jena Webb, Mothers Step In – Rosemère and surrounding area
Emilie Robert, Mothers Step In – Rouyn-Noranda
Anne-Marie Chapleau, Mothers Step In – Saguenay
Catherine Beauce, Mothers Step In – Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu
Gabrielle Spenard-Bernier, Coordinator of Mothers Step In

mothersstepin.org - meresaufont@gmail.com - #mothersstepin

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Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development's study of Bill C-12, Mothers Step In is submitting recommendations to the committee to amend the bill in a manner that would help Canada achieve net-zero emissions as soon as possible. We are all in a race against time and we need political courage to turn ideas into action and prevent climate tipping points. Our children's future depends on it.

We mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, refuse to accept catastrophic outcomes for future generations. Thousands of us from around the world are raising our voices to protect our beautiful planet and ensure a sustainable future.

As elected officials and representatives of the federal government, your chief responsibility is to protect the health and safety of the public. We are counting on you to base your decisions on the best science available, as you have striven to do for COVID-19. It is now time to treat the climate crisis like a real emergency.

By improving Bill C-12, the federal government has the opportunity to create real climate legislation, in other words, a law that would require Canada to meet science-based targets and that is outfitted with accountability, transparency and responsibility provisions starting in 2025. From now on, all decisions made by those in power should be conceived with the Earth's climate in mind.

This means that it must be unacceptable for the federal government to subsidize the fossil fuel industry and build environmentally disastrous infrastructure like the Trans Mountain pipeline. Our children's future depends on it. It is urgent to stop financing anything that threatens life on Earth as we know and love it.

2. MOTHERS STEP IN

Mothers Step In was created in spring 2020 out of a sense of urgency shared by many mothers and grandmothers about the need to protect the future of our children and future generations against climate inaction. Mothers Step In is a decentralized and diverse movement from coast to coast. If there is one common thread that transcends all cultures, religions, income levels and political allegiances, it is the love that we have for our children and the need to protect them.

Despite the pandemic, more than 5,600 people have joined Mothers Step In to demand climate action. More than 30 action groups have formed in almost every region of Quebec, from Abitibi to the Gaspé, and even across the Atlantic in Belgium. In English Canada, we are partnering with For Our Kids to maximize our impact on the federal level.

3. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The government must recognize its responsibility to future generations

We mothers fight for our children, who cannot vote yet will bear the brunt of the climate crisis. We are calling on the government to recognize the principle of intergenerational equity and its own responsibility to future generations in Bill C-12. This is particularly important given that climate change, in addition to some of the current solutions, will have consequences for generations to come. We refuse to leave our children with such a significant ecological debt.

3.2. The government must start on its path to net-zero emissions as soon as possible and achieve it by 2050 at the latest.

Our emissions targets were never consistent with global efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C and keep it well below 2°C, let alone to meet our own targets, despite how meagre they were. It is now impossible to do our fair share under the Paris Agreement because of decades of inaction and rampant GHG emissions. Any reduction target that is enshrined in law would represent a political compromise on what science and equity require and could, at best, merely represent a minimal effort that would be strengthened by the implementation of the legislation.

Instead, Bill C-12's main objective needs to be changed to make zero emissions a race against time rather than a 2050 deadline. Zero emissions must be achieved as soon as possible and no later than 2050 (section 6, Bill C-12).

3.3. This race must involve a cross-cutting, whole-of-government binding approach to create a climate test that all major government decisions must be subject to.

Bill C-12 must ensure in section 4 that the government achieves the targets that were set. The plans developed under section 9 must demonstrate the achievement of the targets.

Moreover, for the federal government's climate action to be successful, it needs to provide a level of commitment that goes well beyond the Minister of the Environment alone as outlined in Bill C-12 (with the exception of the possible report of the Minister of Finance in section 23). The legislation should specify that the government must subject all its decisions to a climate test in order to truly take climate impacts into account, just like it is already doing for gender-related issues and increasingly for racism-related ones too.

The government committed to investing \$36.2 million to develop a climate lens for federal decision-making in its recent budget and in its plan entitled *A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy*. Subjecting all decisions to climate scrutiny is needed in order to ensure a true systemic shift in

the machinery of government and guarantee that everything is done to achieve zero emissions as soon as possible.

Bill C-12 should ensure that federal decisions consider “the extent to which the effects of the Project hinder or contribute to the Government of Canada’s ability to meet its environmental obligations and its commitments in respect of climate change” as Bill C-69 did for projects that receive a federal impact assessment (see sections 22(i) and 63(e) of the [*Impact Assessment Act*](#) (2019)).

This new requirement could be incorporated into Bill C-12, even if the government needs time to develop the analytical tool. Bill C-12 already provides for section 23, which would require the Minister of Finance to prepare an annual report that would come into force at a later date—one that is different from the rest of the bill (see section 29).

This new requirement for a climate test could also be incorporated into Bill C-12 and come into effect at a later date, after the rest of the legislation, if the government needs time to develop the analytical tool that would be needed to implement it. Section 23, which requires the Minister of Finance to prepare an annual report, comes into force at a later date—one that is different from the rest of the bill (see section 29). The climate test could be subject to the same provision.

3.4. Ensure that the advisory committee provided for in the bill is non-partisan, includes scientific expertise and excludes the fossil fuel industry.

It is international best practice for committees to include a majority of scientific experts, much like Quebec did last fall in its climate governance legislation. We are concerned that the committee of stakeholders appointed by the Minister of the Environment has four members with a total of more than 25 years of professional experience in the fossil fuel industry, which is the main driver of the climate crisis.

As mothers and citizens, we are shocked about the disproportionate influence of the oil and gas industry. Canada is the largest per capita financial supporter of the fossil fuel industry among all G20 countries. Financial support for this sector must cease immediately.

This industry is in a direct conflict of interest with the fight against climate change since it is the main driver of the environmental crisis. It must have no place at the table when negotiating solutions, just as the tobacco industry is no longer involved in the fight against tobacco use. The expert panel must be free of the fossil fuel industry’s influence, and so must the federal government as it draws a path to zero emissions. For example, the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which came into effect in 2005, states in Article 5.3 that parties shall ensure that the development and implementation of public health policies on tobacco control are “protect[ed] ... from [the] commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.” Similarly, Bill C-12 should ensure that the fight against climate change is not influenced by the commercial and other vested interests of the fossil fuel industry.

Approximately 75% of Quebec’s advisory committee members are researchers or academics; the same is true in France and the United Kingdom. In comparison, Canada’s committee has only one, while the

federal government claims to base its decisions on science. Mothers Step In is calling for greater consistency in that regard.

It is crucial that the committee that advises the government, and ideally Parliament, be truly independent. It should be made up of members who are selected based on their multi-disciplinary expertise and Indigenous traditional knowledge, as set out in the legislation, and have a majority of scientists.

Specific measures must be in place to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure that the budget, secretariat staff, internal rules and agenda are solely under the purview of the committee.

The required expertise should include not only climate science, but also social science, Indigenous traditional knowledge, and innovation and employment know-how in order to ensure a fair transition. Life cycle analysis would be particularly relevant to include in order to avoid promoting ideas that look good on the surface but only shift the problem through rebound effects. Furthermore, large industrial emitters should have zero representation.

Canada should follow Quebec's example of implementing best practices for the legal framework behind the independent expert committee, which is made up of a majority of multidisciplinary scientists. This, at the very least, should be incorporated into the federal bill.

3.5. Other highlights of climate responsibility

Without repeating the entirety of our letter that we sent in January, we would like to stress the importance of ensuring real, effective climate accountability. Bill C-12 must include a more robust accountability system that ensures that targets are met and binding agreements are enforced by the courts.

In addition, Bill C-12 must require mandatory annual progress reports to Parliament. These reports should outline Canada's GHG reduction targets to create plans to meet those targets and help Canadians adapt to a changing climate.

4. CONCLUSION

We need real climate legislation to collectively change our words into action. The science is clear. To avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis, we must drastically reduce our GHG emissions now. We must win the race to zero emissions as soon as possible. We cannot wait until 2050.

Clearly, not enough has been done to date to protect the health and safety of our children. As illustrated by the five recommendations above, solutions exist. They are within our reach and will benefit the health and well-being of all, even if they involve significant changes.

We believe that, by adopting the recommendations that we have submitted to you here, Canada would finally have real climate legislation.

Our children—your children, the children of Quebec, Canada and Earth—deserve politicians who make decisions from the heart and provide rigorous safeguards for our climate. We are counting on you.

APPENDIX

Our Heartfelt Cry

We are Mothers and Grandmothers, related by blood or not.
We are standing up to protect our children.

Our children no longer want to have children.
Our children are calling for help.
Our children are deliverers of promise.
We gave them life and told them of beauty, sweetness and overwhelming possibilities.

We gave birth to them.
Nursed them.
Cared for them.
We are proud and angry.
Loving and determined.
We demand strong and immediate action.
Integrity and political courage.

We are from everywhere, we are countless.
From coast to coast and beyond.

We are mother wolf, mother caribou, mother goose and mother wolverine.
We are mother beluga who dies while giving birth and mother kangaroo who flees the fire.
We are all mothers.
We are also yours.

We are angry, and you know that our anger is just.
We want a future.
We want life to win.
It is our duty to protect it and also yours.
We are going to do everything for it.

We will cradle with one arm and wave with the other.
The love of our children is our weapon of mass construction, for the future of the world.