

18 March 2019

Re: 7.2 Implementation of Living Wage (GIC, 22 March 2019)

Dear Councillors:

I write in strong support of the proposal before you today at the General Issues Committee to raise the wages of the lowest paid workers at the City of Hamilton to a “living wage,” calculated at present to be \$15.85 per hour.

The report prepared for Council provides some important data for you to weigh as you consider the merits of the proposal, but I want to draw your attention to the unfortunate way that “internal equity” is presented in the report.

The report states that *internal equity* is impacted “when employees perceive that they are not being compensated in a fair and equitable manner according to the relative value of their roles in an organization.” In other words, the report invites us to view internal equity as being impacted when wages are raised for the the lowest-paid workers with no corresponding raise for those already making at or around \$15.85 per hour. The implication is that this measure will disrupt an already-existing *equity* in workers’ pay, whereas I want to suggest that passing this motion will be a step toward fixing long-standing inequities that already exist in the compensation system at the City of Hamilton.

If the report accepts (as it does) the Hamilton and District Labour Council’s definition of a living wage as “the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and participate in their community,” then it is clear that *internal equity* is already impacted when we have workers performing duties for the city while earning *less* than what is needed to cover basic living expenses and to participate in the community.

Further, *internal equity* is already impacted when we have summer students in parks or horticulture (as cited in the report) working side-by-side with regular workers but earning less per hour for performing tasks that are substantially the same. In many cases, then, we already have unequal pay for equal work institutionalized in our compensation system.

If equity and fairness is one of our primary concerns in this discussion — as the report invites us to accept and which I would support wholeheartedly — then I would argue that these existing inequities have a greater day-to-day impact on *internal equity* at the City of Hamilton than those anticipated as a result of wage compression and identified in the report.

But the concerns about perceived fairness among workers already making a living wage should not go unaddressed, and I would suggest that City management has a great opportunity to address these concerns next time they are the bargaining table with CUPE Local 5167, the union that represents many of the front-line workers who make Hamilton “the best place to raise

a child and age successfully.” The City can be a leader for decent work and set the bar for other employers to follow.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Evan Johnston
Ward 3 resident

CC: Councillor Nrinder Nann — Ward 3