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Keeping a Worker Lens on Economic Recovery and Sustainability

Submitted by Anthony Marco
on behalf of the Hamilton and District Labour Council

PREFACE

As the representative on the taskforce from the Hamilton and District Labour Council, I have tried (on several occasions) to ensure that a worker lens is applied to the recommendations and decisions that are made by the taskforce.

Such efforts have been challenging as I have not been invited to participate in a single workgroup meeting, nor have I been asked for input or had my opinion sought on any of the proposals coming forward.

I don't believe this has necessarily been a failure in any individual or group on the taskforce, but rather a result of inherent structures that have evolved over the past few months and the demand for efficiencies and promptness with our proposed timelines for reporting.

I am thankful that the taskforce, from the outset, has considered improvements to childcare availability a key concern. I am also thankful there has been consideration given to better accessibility to public transit.

The recommendations attached to this report are consistent with a recognition that the resulting legacy of this taskforce cannot simply be about recovery but about future sustainability for decent work in our city.

As I cannot ensure considerations have been made with a "labour lens" that was informed by the Labour Council, nor its affiliates and coalition partners who represent well over 100,000 workers in this city, I have prepared the following set of recommendations that we hope will be adopted by the taskforce, the sectors therein, and any considered by any voting bodies who are approving the recommendations going forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AM', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Anthony Marco
President, Hamilton and District Labour Council

1) All workers in Hamilton deserve a Living Wage of \$16.45/hr.

Living Wage is not, by any means, a "living large" wage. With the common expenses that workers face on a daily, monthly, and annual basis, a living wage is the bare minimum that a worker can survive on (while working full-time) and not live in poverty.

All employers in Hamilton should strive to pay a living wage to their employees. While the Labour Council and its coalition partners realize that the increase in expense may be unrealistic in one fell swoop, we hope to encourage that small business realize the importance of retaining a workforce, preventing attrition, and having employees that can keep themselves and their families healthy at home. If, as an employer, you concede the idea that earning below a living wage does keep workers in poverty then, by propagating this wage scale, such employers are poverty employers.

WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS IN HAMILTON PAY ALL EMPLOYEES A LIVING WAGE OR SET A SHORT TIMELINE BY WHICH TO BRING ALL EMPLOYEES TO A LIVING WAGE.

For larger scale employers within the institutional, industrial or public sector areas, especially where collective agreements may already mandate better than living wage for most employees, while you may not have employees making less than a living wage, you are probably responsible for many workers who make less from services and jobs you contract out.

WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS (WHO CONTRACT JOBS OR SERVICES) ADOPT PROCEDURES WHEREBY LIVING WAGE REQUIREMENTS ARE WRITTEN INTO PROCUREMENT AND TENDERING POLICIES.

A Living Wage saves us all money on health care, housing, and countless other social programs that clamour for funding through taxation. If the workgroups on this taskforce are going to ask for help from all levels of government to get through the economic impact of the pandemic, let us begin at a level that raises all workers up and does not restart by leaving our most vulnerable workers behind.

2) Hamilton employers need to commit to ending wage discrimination

Women in Canada are being paid less than men for work of equal value. It's happening to women no matter what their level of education or whether they work full or part-time. This wage discrimination exists because work traditionally dominated by women – like work in the caring professions – has always been undervalued compared to work traditionally dominated by men. The result? Women are making less over their working lives, and are more likely to live in poverty and end up retiring into poverty.

The numbers don't lie, and they are appalling. Today – in 2020 – women overall make 32 percent less than men. But the gender gap is even wider for some. Here's how, on average, different women fare compared to white men born in Canada:

- Racialized women make 40 percent less.
- Indigenous women make 45 percent less.
- Immigrant women make 55 percent less.
- Women with a disability make 56 percent less.

In 2004, a national Pay Equity Task Force laid out the path for a proactive approach to ending wage discrimination against women in Canada. Since then, trade unions and feminist organizations have consistently advocated for the implementation of the Task Force recommendations. Proactive pay equity regimes in several provinces—most notably, Ontario and Quebec—offer good examples of what can be achieved, as well as what to avoid.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us just how important work traditionally performed by women is to the health and safety of our communities. Cleaners, cashiers and caregivers are among the workers now recognized as “essential.”

But the work in these undervalued sectors is often invisible and unrecognized, marked with poor working conditions, exposure to violence and harassment and other health and safety risks, limited job security and access to benefits, including paid sick leave. Because many of these workers are Black, Indigenous, women of colour and recent immigrants, the undervaluing of this work also contributes to wider wage gaps for marginalized workers.

The pandemic brought many of these realities to the surface, and brought new or greater risks and inequities, such as a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 for these marginalized groups. Unlike other countries, women make up the majority of diagnosed COVID-19 cases in Canada, and more women than men have lost their lives.

While some of these workers received temporary wage boosts, more needs to be done to make sure this work is properly valued and compensated for the long-term.

WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS IN HAMILTON, WHO HAVE NOT ALREADY UNDERTAKEN PAY EQUITY ASSESSMENTS DO SO BY CONTACTING THE ONTARIO PAY EQUITY COMMISSION FOR GENDER EQUITY AND IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STANDARD SET BY THE CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION FOR THOSE WHOSE GENDER IS INTERSECTIONAL WITH RACE, LGBTQ2SI+, AND/OR DISABILITY.

3) All Canadians deserve National Pharmacare and Dental Care Plans

While it is outside of the scope of this taskforce to create such vast programs as national, public, single-payer pharmacare and dental care plans, we would hope that all employers would realize the immediate benefits to their employees upon the creation of such plans.

The bulk buying of pharmaceuticals at a national level would save our current health care systems over four billion dollars a year compared to current systems of purchasing and hospital stays due to inaccessibility to medication. Further, a pharmacare system would alleviate many of the responsibilities of employers to pay for prescription coverage in employee benefit plans.

Canada is the only country with a nationalized health care plan that doesn't have some kind of pharmacare plan. Workers in Hamilton should not have to choose between medicine and food, yet many have to make this choice on a daily basis.

Healthy workers are more productive, do not take as many sick days, and do not require as many medical accommodations. If their families are similarly healthy, they will not require as many family status leave days or compassionate leave days to care for family members who are ill.

WE RECOMMEND THAT THE TASK FORCE COMMUNICATE SUPPORT OF PUBLICLY RUN, SINGLE-PAYER, UNIVERSAL PHARMACARE AND DENTAL CARE PLANS TO FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

4) All workers deserve to come home from work without injury or occupational disease

WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS STRICTLY ADHERE TO ARTICLE 25(2)(h) OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT WHICH DICTATES THAT AN EMPLOYER SHALL *“take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker”*.

WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS STRICTLY ADHERE TO ARTICLE 50.1 WHICH PROHIBITS REPRISALS AGAINST ANY WORKER WHO IS ACTING OR REPORTING IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT.

5) Workers deserve to be in workplaces free of gender-based harassment and violence

Sexual harassment and violence remains a very serious barrier to women's equality, especially in the workplace. It can range from verbal and psychological harassment, to unwanted touching, to physical and sexual assault. Many women are now also harassed in digital spaces. Perpetrators can be co-workers, supervisors, or even clients, patients or members of the public.

Sexual harassment and violence can have serious consequences on women's physical, emotional and mental health, and on their work performance. It can compromise their ability to advance in the workplace and even lead to job loss.

Half of women in Canada will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. It can be physical or sexual abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, financial manipulation or control, spiritual abuse, criminal harassment or stalking. It can happen at work, at home, online or in the community.

About every six days in Canada, a woman is killed by her intimate partner. Each night, almost 4,000 women – many with children – turn to shelters because they aren't safe at home. Research by Canada's unions found that almost 40 percent of working women have experienced domestic violence. For most of those women, the impacts followed them to work, putting their jobs and their co-workers at risk. COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbated these realities for many workers. During stay-at-home orders, it becomes increasingly difficult for women to access services as they are trapped at home with their abuser.

Not all women experience harassment and violence in the same way. Young women, Indigenous women and women with disabilities experience higher rates of harassment and violence. For racialized and immigrant women, lesbian and bisexual women and trans and non-binary folk, sexual harassment and violence can be exacerbated by other forms of discrimination. They also face more barriers when it comes to finding services and support.

Workers in almost every province and territory, as well as federally regulated workplaces, now have between three and five paid days of domestic violence leave so they can seek the support and services they need.

WE RECOMMEND ALL EMPLOYERS ADOPT POLICIES, PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES THAT CLEARLY ENSURE EFFECTIVE AND IMPARTIAL MECHANISMS ARE IN PLACE TO ENSURE INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS, PROVIDING SUPPORT AND PROTECTION FOR SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND HOLDING PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTABLE.

6) Hamilton workers deserve an Environmental Just Transition

Environmental racism is real in our city.

Racialized Hamiltonians make up a proportionally higher number of working poor. While environmental issues impact all of us, such marginalized families feel the impacts more acutely and immediately.

Hamilton needs to partner with the provincial and federal governments to promote and expand public investments in renewable energy production, green building construction, and public transportation offer major opportunities for skills training and the large-scale creation of good jobs. Such job growth areas can focus on developing renewable energy, home and building retrofits, and low-emissions public transportation.

The City should consider zero-emission vehicles for the entire city fleet including the Hamilton Street Railway.

Future Hamilton budgets must significantly recognize Just Transition measures to assist workers, their families and their communities affected by climate change policy to access training and employment services, relocation, childcare and housing assistance to adjust to new jobs, and support for older workers to transition to retirement.

This could include a focus on providing decent jobs in land remediation and restoration, climate adaptation, and energy efficiency. It should also include green skills training and learning opportunities through partnerships with public education and training providers, with an emphasis on women, marginalized, low-income and at-risk youth.

THE CITY OF HAMILTON SHOULD SET CONNECT ANY EXISTING TARGETS FOR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS TO FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN RENEWABLE ENERGIES, HOME AND BUILDING RETROFITS, PUBLIC TRANSIT, AND JUST TRANSITION MEASURES SUPPORTING WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

7) Civic and Institutional employers must model decent work for other employers

WE RECOMMEND THAT THE CITY OF HAMILTON AND OTHER LARGE EMPLOYERS IN THE CITY HELP TO ENSURE ALL OF THE ABOVE DECENT WORK PRACTICES ACROSS HAMILTON BY REQUIRING ATTESTATIONS OF COMPLIANCE TO THE AFOREMENTIONED

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALL BUSINESSES WHO ARE PART OF TENDERING OR PROCUREMENT FOR GOODS OR SERVICES.

Summary of Recommendations in this Report

- 1. WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS IN HAMILTON PAY ALL EMPLOYEES A LIVING WAGE OR SET A SHORT TIMELINE BY WHICH TO BRING ALL EMPLOYEES TO A LIVING WAGE.**
- 2. WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS (WHO CONTRACT JOBS OR SERVICES) ADOPT PROCEDURES WHEREBY LIVING WAGE REQUIREMENTS ARE WRITTEN INTO PROCUREMENT AND TENDERING POLICIES.**
- 3. WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS IN HAMILTON, WHO HAVE NOT ALREADY UNDERTAKEN PAY EQUITY ASSESSMENTS TO DO SO BY CONTACTING THE ONTARIO PAY EQUITY COMMISSION FOR GENDER EQUITY AND IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STANDARD SET BY THE CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION FOR THOSE WHOSE GENDER IS INTERSECTIONAL WITH RACE, LGBTQ2SI+, AND/OR DISABILITY.**
- 4. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE TASK FORCE COMMUNICATE SUPPORT OF PUBLICLY RUN, SINGLE-PAYER, UNIVERSAL PHARMACARE AND DENTAL CARE PLANS TO FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.**
- 5. WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS STRICTLY ADHERE TO ARTICLE 25(2)(h) OF THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT WHICH DICTATES THAT AN EMPLOYER SHALL *“take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker”*.**
- 6. WE RECOMMEND THAT ALL EMPLOYERS STRICTLY ADHERE TO ARTICLE 50.1 WHICH PROHIBITS REPRISALS AGAINST ANY WORKER WHO IS ACTING OR REPORTING IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT.**
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- 8. WE RECOMMEND THE CITY OF HAMILTON SHOULD SET CONNECT ANY EXISTING TARGETS FOR GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS TO FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN RENEWABLE ENERGIES, HOME AND BUILDING RETROFITS, PUBLIC TRANSIT, AND JUST TRANSITION MEASURES SUPPORTING WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**
- 9. WE RECOMMEND THAT THE CITY OF HAMILTON AND OTHER LARGE EMPLOYERS IN THE CITY HELP TO ENSURE ALL OF THE ABOVE DECENT WORK PRACTICES**

Mayor's Task Force on Economic Recovery

September 25, 2020

**ACROSS HAMILTON BY REQUIRING ATTESTATIONS OF COMPLIANCE TO THE
AFOREMENTIONED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALL BUSINESSES WHO ARE PART
OF TENDERING OR PROCUREMENT FOR GOODS OR SERVICES.**