



THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF WOMEN IN CANADA

Tuesday, May 30, 2017, 8:45 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

Brief¹ submitted by the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (Afeas) to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Introduction

On behalf of Afeas, I want to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women for inviting us to participate in the hearings related to its study of the economic security of women in Canada.

First, I will give you a brief overview of Afeas, and then I will talk about the two main areas that the government should focus on when implementing solutions to prevent Canadian women from being at an economic disadvantage their entire lives.

A bit about Afeas

Afeas is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1966. It represents 8,034 Quebec women who work as volunteers in 225 local groups located in 11 regions.

Afeas is a dynamic, cutting-edge, feminist organization that gives a voice to women to help them stand up for their rights and actively participate in the development of Quebec and Canadian society. Through education and social action, Afeas is helping to build a society based on such values as peace, equality, fairness, justice, respect, and solidarity.

Since its beginning, Afeas has been striving toward gender equality in every sphere of society. That is the organization's main goal, and as a result, it works on various issues affecting women in Quebec and Canada, such as:

- Gender equality, including women's ability to access democratic institutions at all levels;
- Financial security of women throughout their career and after they retire including the recognition of the unpaid work women do within the family as mothers and caregivers;
- Access to education and training, pay equity, non-traditional jobs, and measures to support a family, school and work-life balance;
- Access to safe living environments and measures to address violence against women and girls.

¹ The French version of this document reflects Afeas' position.



The economic security of women

Afeas believes that both the paid and unpaid work of Canadian women must be taken into account in order to ensure their economic security.

With regard to unpaid work, Afeas believes that it is essential for Canadian women that they be given social and economic recognition for the work they do within the family as mothers and caregivers.

With regard to paid work, Afeas believes that pay equity, access to non-traditional jobs (for example, professions and trades in the field of science or in the construction industry), and access to high-level, high-paying jobs are essential to building a future for Canadian women and girls.

Unpaid work

Since 1966, Afeas has been considering what impact the lack of recognition for women's work has on our society. In 1968, Afeas presented the information it collected on "homemakers" to the Bird Commission.

One of Afeas' first campaigns sought recognition for the contributions women make to family businesses run by their husbands (farms, businesses, professional offices, etc.). In 1974, Afeas succeeded. These women were finally given compensation and benefits just like the other people employed by their husbands' businesses.

Other campaigns followed and progress was made toward improving the living conditions of women in Quebec and Canada.


Some 35 years later, on April 1, 2001, Afeas created Invisible Work Day. As part of this annual campaign, which is held on the first Tuesday in April, Afeas educates the public and decision makers about the social and economic value of invisible work. Afeas believes that, if the contributions that women make within the family and community, which are essential to our society, were recognized, then social and financial measures could be implemented that would prevent women from living in poverty.

On April 6, 2010, at the request of Afeas, MP Nicole Demers moved a motion to make the first Tuesday in April national unpaid work day. Although this motion was adopted, no action has yet been taken to implement it.

Here are a few recommendations concerning unpaid or invisible work.

To recognize unpaid work

- The Government of Canada should make the first Tuesday in April a National Unpaid Work Day, add it to the calendar of national days and acknowledge it every year.
- Statistics Canada should assess and calculate the value of unpaid work in Canada to show how important it is to the gross domestic product (GDP) using the 2015



General Social Survey on Time Use. This calculation has not been done for 25 years, since 1992.

- Statistics Canada should make sure that the question regarding household activities is included in the 2021 long-form census, as it was in 1996, 2001 and 2006, so that the people responding to it are aware of how much of that type of work they do every day.

To analyze the impact of unpaid work

- The federal government should ensure that all laws, policies and programs undergo gender-based analysis (GBA) in order to determine how they will affect women, particularly their economic security.

To improve work-school-life balance

- The Government of Canada should adopt a policy on family, school, work-life balance that applies to all spheres of society, including public institutions and private businesses under federal jurisdiction.

To support the roles of mothers and caregivers

- The Government of Canada should work with the provinces and territories to create a family insurance plan that would cover mothers (fathers) when a child is born or adopted and caregivers when they have to take time off work to care for a loved one who is sick, has a disability, or is losing his or her autonomy. Every province and territory must have the option of opting out of the plan, under the appropriate agreements, as Quebec did with Employment Insurance in 2006.
- The federal government should work with the provinces and territories to create a national child-care program to give women access to affordable child care and allow them to return to the labour market, if they so desire. Every province and territory must have the option of opting out of this program, under the appropriate agreements, which Quebec would do because it has its own children care program.
- The Government of Canada should provide retirement benefit credits equivalent to 60% of the average industrial wage (AIW) for the period an individual spent caring for a young child or loved one, if that person does not have any employment income.
- The federal government should turn non-refundable tax credits for stay-at-home mothers and caregivers into refundable tax credits.

Paid work

There was a major influx of Canadian women into the labour force in the late 1960s. At that time, employers considered these women's contributions to the family as complementary to those of their husbands and therefore paid them less. Still today, women generally continue to earn less than men, even for the same work. This lack of pay equity affects many women and has an impact on their economic security throughout their lives. They are negatively affected when they claim benefits, such as maternity, parental or retirement benefits.

Consider the following example: Ms. X earns 80% of the salary that Mr. Y earns for the same job. Ms. X request employment insurance maternity benefits and receives 55% of her income. However, since she was already earning a salary equivalent to only 80% of Mr. Y's salary, she is actually receiving 55% of 80% of Mr. Y's income. She experiences the same sort of loss when she claims retirement benefits because she was receiving 80% of Mr. Y's salary throughout her entire career. How can she recover that loss?

Despite the fact that many women attend training programs, they are still under-represented in science programs and traditional male jobs. What is more, very few of them hold high-level, high-paying positions in the public or private sector.

Here are a few recommendations regarding paid work.

To address pay inequity

- The federal government should pass a proactive law on pay equity within its jurisdiction.
- The federal government should ensure that this law is enforced within its jurisdiction.
- The federal government, with the help of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, should look into how to correct the imbalances between the men and women who are currently in the labour force so that they can be corrected right away and so that Canadian women do not have to deal with the negative impact of these imbalances throughout their careers and in retirement.

The French version of this document reflects Afeas' position.

Total or partial translation and reproduction of this publication for non-commercial purposes is authorized on condition that the exact and complete source is cited.

Afeas: 5999 de Marseille Street, Montreal, Quebec, H1N 1K6
514-251-1636 – info@afeas.qc.ca -- www.afeas.qc.ca

Author: H  l  ne Cornellier, Communications consultant,
Lead on Afeas files