



## Media Release (R)

### **Equal Pay Coalition Calls for Action on 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Pay Equity Act* to End Widespread Gender Pay Discrimination in Ontario**

TORONTO, January 17, 2008. Ontario's Equal Pay Coalition called today on the Ontario Government and Opposition Leaders to work together with the Coalition, employers, trade unions and advocacy organizations to end the widespread pay discrimination Ontario women face. "On January 1, 2008, the *Pay Equity Act* turned 20 years old". said Mary Cornish, Chair of the Equal Pay Coalition, "While the *Act* helped reduce the gap from 38% in 1985, women, on average, still earn 29% less than men. Pay equity enforcement must be revitalized to deliver pay justice to the current generation of working women who weekly take home inequitable pay."

Noting that "Your Daughters-Mothers -Grandmothers will thank you", colourful postcards calling for Government action and signed by over 4,000 women are being handed over by Coalition supporters at the front of Queen's Park at 11:00 a.m. today with a media conference at 10:30 a.m. Premier Dalton McGuinty, NDP Leader Howard Hampton and Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory are invited to outline their 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary plans for closing the pay gap.

"Ontario women receive less for their work regardless of where they work, the size of their workplace or the precariousness of their work" said Cornish. "Vulnerable women who are racialized, Aboriginal or have disabilities face even greater pay gaps. The pay gap continues into retirement with 42% of elderly women being poor. Over a lifetime, these pay gaps add up to enormous financial losses with Working Women in the US estimating the total for each woman to be between \$700,000 and \$2 million depending on education level," said Cornish.

Ontario's persistent gap shows that many women never received the benefit of pay equity and others lost the gains they made for reasons including economic restructuring and inadequate government funding of pay equity adjustments and the Pay Equity Commission and Hearings Tribunal. Many low paid women fall outside the *Act* or its effective enforcement. Employment equity as well as pay equity measures are needed to address the full gender pay gap.

"Pay equity is equal pay for work of equal value and a fundamental human right guaranteed by ILO Convention 100, ratified by Canada in 1972" said Wayne Samuelson, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour. "This is an urgent problem. The Union movement stands ready to work with the Government and employers on this issue. But Unions are serving warning that they will vigilantly enforce women's pay equity rights where effective actions are not taken."

The World Economic Forum's 2007 Global Gender Gap Report recognizes the key role these "remuneration gaps" play in impairing economies to realize their full potential. "The costs of inaction are high. A province that allows women to be channelled into low paid, undervalued work when the economy needs their skills will not be able to compete successfully in the global economy" said Cornish.

"Women working in child care centres, small community based agencies, and battered women's shelters are being forced to work at discriminatory wages" said Andrea Calver, Acting

Executive Director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "This is because the Government stopped in 2005 the designated pay equity funding paid as a result of the 2003 *CUPE et al.* Charter challenge even though the pay gaps identified in the *Act's* pay equity plans had not yet been closed." Based on the Government's own figures, \$369 million is owing to about 100,000 hard working women for delivering public services in predominantly female workplaces in 2006 and 2007. A further \$77.6 million is owed in 2008 and about \$1.32 billion from 2008-2011. "The time to pay up is now", said Calver.

"Pay discrimination is contributing to Ontario's high poverty levels. With women segregated in undervalued job ghettos and accounting for two-thirds of minimum wage earners, increasing that wage now to \$10 per hour provides a speedy pay equity downpayment to such workers. Effective measures to close the gender pay gap should be a key part of the Government's poverty reduction strategy" said John Argue, Coordinator of the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice. "For poor women, their labour is their greatest asset. The longer the government waits to increase the minimum wage - the more the government contributes to women's poverty and the pay gap." said Mary Cornish.

The Coalition, with its member organizations representing over 1 million Ontarians is seeking meetings with the Minister of Labour, Minister of Finance and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues to discuss the Government's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary enforcement plans including their key requests: 1) increasing the minimum wage to \$10 per hour retroactive to January 1, 2008; 2) full public funding of public sector pay equity adjustments; and 3) full funding of the Pay Equity Commission, the Hearings Tribunal and legal support services for those claiming pay equity violations. The Coalition's campaign will continue throughout 2008 including on February 14, 2008 to mark February 18 Family Day and the importance of pay equity to families, on March 8, 2008 for International Women's Day and in workplaces throughout the year.

It is once again necessary to take action to ensure the Government's promise of pay equity is kept and pay equity compliance is mainstreamed into Ontario's economic life.

**For further information:**

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**See Backgrounder attached and supporting documents at [www.equalpaycoalition.org](http://www.equalpaycoalition.org).**