

Pay equity – it's time to walk the talk



Adopted in 1996, the *Pay Equity Act (PEA)* celebrated its 25th anniversary last November. Correcting systemic discrimination against women is a fundamental right and equity has become a core principle in our society. Even though several advances have been made during this quarter century, it is clear that pay inequity has not been corrected over the years.

It may seem implausible, but the PEA needs to be revised, as it contains provisions that are not conducive to achieving pay equity. Moreover, in its current form, the Act is poorly enforced, its means are limited and it does not achieve its initial objective, particularly for female workers in the public sector.

This is why, in the context of the 2022 Quebec elections, the CSQ is asking parliamentarians and all candidates from all parties to include in their electoral platforms a commitment to improve the Act to give it more teeth and thus counter wage discrimination against women.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE CHANGES THAT NEED TO BE MADE TO THE ACT:

- + More effectively enforce latecomers and employers who fail to pay wage adjustments to proceed;
- + Replace the lump sum due with a salary adjustment without deferment and take into account statutory interest from the date it is due;
- + Give more power to the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST), including the power to intervene to ensure that pay equity is achieved, without limiting or restricting the number of years in which wage adjustments must be paid;
- + Ensure that the CNESST has access to relevant and complete information so that it is sufficiently equipped to understand and analyze the enforcement of the Act in order to verify the achievement of its objective;
- + Impose the establishment of a pay equity audit committee in businesses so that employees can really participate in the work and thus enhance it with their experience and knowledge of the jobs. This would contribute even more to the understanding of this law in the company;
- + Reduce the frequency of the pay equity audit exercise to three years in order to facilitate the identification of discriminatory events and reduce the financial burden on companies that have to correct differences in compensation.

UNFAIR AND UNREASONABLE BUREAUCRATIC DELAYS

Every five years, as part of the pay equity audit provided for in the Act, the employer must determine whether events that have occurred in the company since the previous pay equity exercise have created differences in compensation between predominantly female and male job classes and, if necessary, adjust the compensation for predominantly female job classes.

Thousands of discrimination complaints to the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) have been pending for many years. These complaints were filed as a result of the pay equity audits conducted in December 2010 and December 2015. Thousands of women have been waiting for their cases to be processed for more than 6 years, in some cases even 11 years! This illustrates how the fight to end pay discrimination against women is a long-term process that needs to be better monitored.

PAY EQUITY IS A SOCIETAL ISSUE:

- + Systemic gender discrimination against people working in predominantly female jobs had no place in society 25 years ago, and it definitely has no place in society today;
- + This issue must be a priority for the tens of thousands of female workers in Quebec who are demanding equal pay for work deemed equivalent, and who are demanding that their jobs be recognized for their true value;
- + The government, as an employer of more than 500,000 people, several thousands of whom are women, should set an example, stop unduly extending the time limits for posting pay equity assessments, recognize the right of female workers to pay equity, and grant the compensation adjustments that are due to them;
- + **It's time to walk the talk about pay equity!**

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

THE WAGE GAP BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN
already exists when they enter the labour market and that it increases with age?

IN QUEBEC, WOMEN STILL EARN ON AVERAGE \$2.77 per hour less than men?

IN TERMS OF PAY EQUITY, THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT, AS AN EMPLOYER, does not respect its own legislation or its own deadlines?

IN 2021, WHILE THE AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE FOR MEN GREW BY 2.7%, the average hourly wage for women grew by only 1.5%?

THOUSANDS OF COMPLAINTS OF WAGE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN have still not been dealt with 6 years later? Some have even been pending for 11 years.

THE PAY EQUITY ACT HAS NO EFFECTIVE MECHANISM TO force offending employers to comply with it and to pay the wage adjustments due to discriminated women?