



November 16, 2018.

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Ontario Legislature
111 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON M7A 1A2

Dear Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs:

The University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU) Executive Committee represents over 19,000 graduate students across the University of Toronto tri-campus. We recommend that the government immediately withdraw Bill 47.

The Ontario government introduced Bill 47, *Making Ontario Open for Business Act*, on October 23, 2018. Bill 47 repeals necessary updates to the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) and *Labour Relations Act* (LRA) that were passed in 2017 through the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* (Bill 148). Unlike Bill 148¹, the government is pushing Bill 47 through with little consultation with those workers most reliant on our basic labour laws.

The UTGSU Executive Committee acknowledges the important work of the \$15 and Fairness Campaign organizers and states our support for the recommendations in the submissions made by the Workers' Action Centre (WAC) and Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS) as well as the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL).² The UTGSU recognizes that a \$15 minimum wage is a central part of lifting workers out of poverty. We reaffirm that "Maintaining the legislated \$15 minimum wage and annual indexation to the CPI (Canadian Pricing Index) is Ontario's best strategy to reduce poverty and boost the economy with no cost to taxpayers or the government" (p. 7, WAC & PCLS Submission on Bill 47).

Put simply, Bill 47 favours big business by lowering the fine for employer convictions from \$100 000 to \$25 000 and includes regressive, bureaucratic, and unfair repeals that infringe on workers' rights of the most marginalized employees. Particularly affected are

¹ The first phase of the two-year long Changing Workplaces Review involved 12 public consultations across Ontario with over 200 presentations and 300 written submissions. The second phase of the Review involved stakeholder meetings, an academic advisory committee, 10 commissioned academic studies, and 280 written submissions leading to a 419-page final report with 173 recommendations. The Review involved substantial information and resources from the Ministry of Labour (p. 1, WAC & PCLS Submission on Bill 47)

² See references for links to the submissions on Bill 47 from WAC and PCLS & OFL.

women, part-time and casual workers, seasonal workers, recent immigrants, and recent immigrant women³ who are often in the most precarious employment positions.

Over the past year, employers have spent considerable time updating their human resources policies and modernizing their employment practices. Employers and employees alike have already planned for the legislated increase in the minimum wage. The changes to the personal emergency leave provisions, including reducing access to paid and unpaid sick leave, will increase the spread of disease with increased costs to Ontario's health care system and to employers. Furthermore, by re-introducing the red tape of doctors' notes, Bill 47 will result in significant additional costs that are unnecessary and wasteful.

Ultimately, for the reasons outline above, Bill 47 undermines progressive steps to alleviate poverty and clearly represents a significant threat to workers' rights, exacerbating bureaucracy and increasing economic barriers for society's most vulnerable workers.

We aim to hold the government accountable, and we reiterate our strong recommendation that the government immediately withdraw Bill 47 in its entirety.

Sincerely,

The UTGSU Executive Committee

³ The majority of workers (82%) who will see their wages rise to \$15 are adult workers. As David Macdonald uncovers, it is women (27%), part-time and casual workers (57%), seasonal workers (49%), recent immigrant (35%), and recent immigrant women (42%) workers whose wages will be raised to \$15 compared to the Ontario average of 23% (p. 3, Macdonald 2018, as cited by WAC & PCLS Submission)

References

Bill 148: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/plan-fair-workplaces-and-better-jobs-bill-148>

Employment Standards Act: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0>

\$15 and Fairness Campaign Demands: <https://www.15andfairness.org/demands>

Labour Relations Act: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/95l01>

Macdonald, David. (July 2018). Ontario Needs a Raise: Who Benefits From a \$15 Minimum Wage? Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Online: https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/Ontario%20Office/2017/07/Ontario_Needs_a_Raise_2017.pdf

Ontario Federation of Labour Submission on Bill 47: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018-11-15-SM-Bill-47.pdf>

Workers' Action Centre and Parkdale Community Legal Services Submission on Bill 47: <http://workersactioncentre.org/policy-papers>