

## **BILL 77, PAY EQUITY ACT**

**Standing committee on Law Amendments**

**November 26, 2004**

**Bonjour,**

**Nous désirons débiter cette présentation en soulignant que l'Association du Nouveau-Brunswick pour l'économie familiale est légiférée par la loi de l'Assemblée législative du Nouveau-Brunswick et cette loi gouverne la profession d'économiste familiale. Une partie de la description de la fonction « d'exercer l'activité d'économie familiale » tel que décrite dans la loi désigne le fait de mettre au point, d'interpréter, d'intégrer et d'appliquer les principes d'économie familiale afin d'améliorer la qualité de vie quotidienne des individus et des familles ce qui inclut aussi et je cite : d'évaluer les politiques et programmes des secteurs publics et privés visant le bien-être des individus et des familles.**

**Puisque cette responsabilité nous a été confiée, nous sommes ici aujourd'hui afin de représenter les citoyens et les citoyennes du Nouveau-Brunswick qui sont concernés par l'équité salariale tel que décrite dans le Rapport Final de la table ronde pour l'équité salariale au Nouveau-Brunswick ainsi que le Bulletin 2004 de la situation des femmes au Nouveau-Brunswick. Nous croyons que l'équité salariale est un sujet qui nous touche toutes et tous, soit directement ou indirectement et que notre province s'en portera mieux si la loi 77 est adoptée.**

**Today we stand before this committee, two very disenchanted Professional Home Economists. In our view, it should not be necessary in 2004, in the Province of New Brunswick, in a progressive country such as Canada to have to appeal on behalf of the citizens of New Brunswick for something as basic as pay equity. It is a human right as stated by the Chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission,**

so why is it not happening? Why does government after government support the principle but do nothing to make it happen?

We are confused as to which direction this government is taking. We have in our hands the well prepared government document entitled: Final Report of the New Brunswick Wage Gap Roundtable which gives all the facts about the inequity that exists and how to go about making changes that will bring about equity. In good Home Economics terms, the recipe is all there, except for one crucial ingredient: in the end it recommends that it be done on a voluntary basis for five years with legislation to follow if nothing happens. History has already proven that nothing will happen. Mothers, wives, sisters and daughters have been waiting since 1972, when Canada signed the International Labour Organization Convention 100 for it to be done voluntarily and very little progress has been accomplished. In 1972, women in this province made only 62% of men's annual earnings and in 30 years we have only gained a mere 10% increase. So who in this room seriously thinks the 19.1 percent hourly wage gap will voluntarily disappear in five years? What guarantee do we have that this will happen without legislation?

It is our understanding that this document has not been accepted by the government which means the five year countdown has not yet begun. Does that lead us to believe that the government seriously is considering passing Bill 77 which would give us proactive pay equity legislation? We certainly hope this hearing is not just another committee formed to give MLA's extra work and pay in order to make concerned people and organizations feel good about being given the opportunity to be heard.

Nevertheless, we chose to be here today as home economists who seek to honour our pledge of improving the quality of life of the New Brunswick population and in the hope that our contribution will have an impact on the outcome of this bill. Before going any further we would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have worked on

preparing the Bill and all the statistics to support it. To continue, this presentation will have three parts. First we will briefly discuss the difference between wage parity and wage equity and elaborate on how pay equity will enhance the quality of life of individuals and families. Secondly, we will present how home economists employed by this government benefited from pay equity. We will conclude with a few remarks on why we feel this Bill would better serve the population than having the Human Rights Commission handle complaints.

According to the Roundtable Report, it seems that many people don't understand the difference between wage parity and wage equity. Although we are sure it has been explained many times during these hearings, we, Home Economists, being practical will use your own situation as MLA's as an example. You are all presumed to have the same job and responsibilities as MLA's and you are all paid the same salary. It doesn't matter who you are, whether you are male or female, businesspersons or lawyers, teachers or leisure coordinators. As MLA's you are equal. You all sit on this committee and are all paid the same daily rate, therefore you have wage parity.

Wage equity occurs when the jobs done are different but their value is assessed as being the same and therefore equal wages are assigned for jobs of equal value. There is an example in a brochure prepared by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women which shows the difference between male and female dominated jobs. If we take the example of guards and other occupations in protective services, which is male dominated work and compare it with female dominated work such as childcare and home support workers. We could say that they both are looking after the security of human beings. But the workers in the security services were getting paid \$16.27 per hour in 2001 while the workers in the childcare services were only being paid \$8.58. Why should the work of the latter be so undervalued then? Are we, as a society more concerned about the welfare of our prisoners than our children?

**This same injustice applies to the food industry. Should the work contribution of construction workers be more valued than that of the foods services? This question always brings back to mind this anonymous quote written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which is: If the poor stopped providing food for the rich, the rich would have to eat their money.**

**We are confident that if an assessment of value of work were done, these salaries would be more equal. If as a society we chose to value the work of child care workers with reasonable pay then this incentive may motivate them to become better educated and do even better jobs of helping our children become productive citizens. Who knows, we may end up living in a society with a lesser need for guards and security workers which in return would lead to a better quality of life.**

**As Home Economists we witness the negative effects low incomes bring to the quality of life of New Brunswick families. Home Economists work directly with these families as regional home economists in government, as early childhood interventionists, in community agencies and as teachers. We witness first hand the effects of poverty where the families have inadequate housing, clothing and foods. When families earn an adequate income to provide for these basic needs it fosters healthy child development.**

**What we observe in low income families situations is confirmed by Health Canada who recently proclaimed that poverty is the most reliable predictor of poor health, premature death and disability. The British Medical Society went even further with the following comment; the more equally distributed the wealth, the healthier the society. In 2001 in New-Brunswick, 15 000 children lived in low income families. Out of these, 7000 young New Brunswickers came from single mother households. Statistics show that 71% of single mothers are in the workforce.**

Other statistics confirm that 12 000 women in New Brunswick work for minimum salary compared with 6000 men. These numbers are even more appalling when you consider that out of those 6000 men, 3000 are boys between the ages 15 to19, and are therefore adolescents. But in the case of women, almost 4 000 are between 25 and 44 years of age (child rearing years) and only earn minimum wage. Making a proactive law insisting on pay equity would change this situation. By eliminating low incomes based on the job being considered women's work and by paying employees for the true value of the work, we would first and foremost enhance the quality of life of these children living in these families.

On a more positive note, lets now take a look at a group of fortunate Home Economists who worked for the Province of New Brunswick and received wage equity many years ago. I will ask Margaret McCormack to tell us a story of a female dominated occupation that was compared with a male dominated one. We decided to tell you this as we believe we were an exception to all that was happening at that time.

I began to work for the N.B. Department of Agriculture in 1965 as a District Home Economist. I had the responsibility of working with rural women and 4 H clubs in the counties of Saint John, Kings, Queens, Westmorland, Albert, Kent and Northumberland; quite a large region, I think you will agree. In that same region there were District Agriculturalists located in Sussex, Moncton (2), Bouctouche, Richibuctou, and Chatham as well as two Assistant Agriculturalists. So, as you can see, there was one home economist covering the same region as 8 agriculturalists. In most circumstances, they were working with the men while I was working with the women. To further explain inequity, I will compare my job with the assistant agriculturist working in Moncton. We had the same entry level requirement which was a Bachelor's degree. His supervisor was sitting next door to him, while mine was in Fredericton. I started with a salary of \$4000 and he started at \$5000. Oh yes, and did I mention, he was given a government car to

use and I had to provide my own. When I was complaining to him how unequal our workload was, he said and I quote: You will never see the day when you make as much money as I do. But this is not the end of the story...

At this time I would like to point out that Home Economists usually didn't stay in the position for long. You might figure out some of the reasons why, especially if they were interested in starting a family. However I was an exception and in 1968 I was still around and the rural women had begun to demand more services, so through political lobbying a second position was created in Moncton. In 1969, I was asked to go to Fredericton to assist the Director. I didn't want to go. They made me an offer and I said I would not go for less than \$9000. Let me say that my request caused quite a shockwave. However, they came up with the money and I unwillingly moved to Fredericton. By the way the Assistant Agriculturalist mentioned earlier was now the District Agriculturalist in Fredericton. When he came in and asked what my salary was, needless to say there was another shockwave in Fredericton since I was earning more than he was. He got nowhere with his complaints as I had Provincial responsibilities, but he tried. I must confess, I felt just a bit of satisfaction in that encounter. However I'm sure I wouldn't have received this salary if I had really wanted to go to work in Fredericton because I wouldn't have bargained for more.

This life experience was shared in order to explain to you what it was like before we had the right to unionize. When that time came, the government formed us into bargaining groups. The Home Economists were fortunately grouped with the Agriculturalists, Agricultural Engineers and the Veterinarians. Since the Home Economists were a small group, they didn't know what else to do with us. We formed a union which was called the N.B. Agriculture Employees Association and did our own bargaining. We had a very forward looking executive and bargaining committee who worked diligently on our behalf and obtained in the first contract a salary scale which gave the Home Economists pay

equity with the Agriculturalists. If you were in an Agriculturalist 1 position step (a) or Home Economist 1 step (a) you received the same salary and so on throughout the scale. Of course because of this the home economists received a large increase in salary. However since there were so few of us the cost was insignificant and it was readily accepted.

At this time the Department of Agriculture was signing agreements with the Federal Government which gave them money to do rural development. With this funding more Home Economists were hired in the North East of N.B. By the time we were negotiating our third contract, the numbers had swollen and NB Treasury Board had the bright idea to present to our bargaining team a wage offer that would lower all the steps in the Home Economist's pay scale so that it would be 5% less than the Agriculturalist's. The reason they gave was that it was a question of supply and demand. Yes, there were lots of Home Economists looking for work, however the truth was that the Universite de Moncton was still not graduating enough bilingual Home Economists to meet the demand. Fortunately, after much discussion, when it came to a vote, one wise Agriculturalist pointed out that we were not just voting on a money issue but on a principle and that the union as a group should support the Home Economists in maintaining equity. Well, he convinced them and they voted to reject the offer. The government backed down and we maintained our salaries only because the union was behind us.

Later, during the Office of Government Reform under the Hatfield Government, many of the Home Economists were moved to Social Services, as our work was considered more social than economic. We were being paid much more than the other professionals we were working with as part of our new team because we were still classified as Home Economists and paid accordingly.

In 1990 when the government looked at wage equity for Part one of the Civil Service, the Home Economists were not going to be studied as

there were too few in each classification. However, we asked through our union for our classification to be studied and in the end were given an increase in salary. Believe it or not, we were paid more than the Agriculturalists until the next contract. It is not surprising that at the very next negotiation, they were given wage equity. Isn't it intriguing that it did not take 30 years to rectify this situation?

To this day we are thankful to have been part of a group who valued our work and stood up for us when equity might have slipped away. I have checked with the Home Economists who are still working for government and been informed that they still have wage equity. Would we have received it without the support of our union? I don't think so.

To continue this presentation, we will now address the position the Human Rights Commission has taken. It is our understanding that the Commission has spoken against Bill 77 and supports the wage gap Roundtable recommendation of trying the voluntary approach once again. However, they would like to have the pay equity standards under their jurisdiction. Our question is, why has it taken Bill 77 for the commission to propose taking this action? They have been hearing complaints for almost 40 years and some of those were wage equity issues which were considered because they saw them as discrimination on the basis of sex. Why were they not proactive and make the proposed changes sooner?

The statistics show that the wage gap has not changed a lot over the years. It has fluctuated up and down between 1971 and 2001. Women earnings in 1971 were 62% of men's earnings and in 2001, they were 72%. This indicates there is still a long way to go and the human rights commission still insists they can change this without a law? We disagree. There are approximately 150 000 working women in New Brunswick and only about 20% are unionized. That means there are over 128 000 women with no support whatsoever in bringing a complaint forward. They would be entirely on their own. At first we thought how



will the Commission ever handle such an onslaught of complaints if every woman was informed of their rights and had the courage to proceed. Then we realised that there are few women who have the personnel resources whether they be financial or emotional to carry through with the process. Once again we say there needs to be proactive legislation to guarantee respect for wage equity in order to close the wage gap.

As a closing note we would like to remind this hearing committee that Canada has been a leader in establishing human rights as in the case of the Famous 5 who obtained on October 18 1929, that women were now persons, which led the way for many more countries to do so. Canadian women became persons before the queen of England, imagine that! We should also be proud of Grace Annie Lockart who was the first woman in the entire British Empire to obtain a B. Sc. from the Mount Allison University in 1875 right here in New-Brunswick. In 2005, this accomplishment will celebrate its 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A law on pay equity passed by the NB legislature would definitely show the world that New-Brunswick and Canada are willing to honour financially and concretely the ink that was put on the International Labour Organisation Convention 100 signed in 1972.

Finally we challenge the government of NB to grab the opportunity at hand; pass the bill presented to them and go down in history as legislators who cared enough to honour and value the work done by their mothers, sisters and wife's to create a better workplace for their daughters and grand daughters. Pay equity will certainly do that.