

STATEMENT BY ONTARIO ECONOMISTS AND LABOUR POLICY EXPERTS ON MINIMUM WAGES AND INCOME SECURITY

The following Ontario economists and labour policy experts have endorsed this statement on Minimum Wages and Income Security:

The Ontario minimum wage has not been increased in over 8 years, during which time it has lost over 20 percent of its real purchasing power to inflation. Relative to average wage and productivity levels, Ontario offers among the weakest minimum wage protection of any Canadian province. The minimum wage is important for protecting and improving the incomes of workers throughout the lower segments of the labour market, not just for those who are employed at the legal minimum. The erosion of the minimum wage can be linked to the polarization of income distribution in Ontario (recent census data indicate that Ontario has the most unequal distribution of any province) and to the increasing incidence of poverty among employed persons.

There is a common, but incorrect, assumption that higher minimum wages destroy low-wage jobs and increase unemployment among those they are most intended to help. Modern economic research has indicated, however, that the negative employment effects of minimum wages are negligible and can be overwhelmed by the positive impacts of minimum wages on labour force participation and consumer spending. In other words, it is more likely that higher minimum wages are associated with enhanced employment and income opportunities for low-wage workers.

The 8-year freeze in the minimum wage, along with reductions in other labour market and income supports, has contributed to a situation in which many, if not most, Ontarians are not benefiting from ongoing economic growth. The undersigned Ontario economists and labour policy experts therefore, call on the provincial government to:

- * implement a significant and timely increase in the provincial minimum wage
- * implement a system in which the minimum wage will be adjusted automatically in line with inflation and productivity growth
- * reinforce other income support programs, especially the provincial social assistance shelter allowance, to reflect living costs in Ontario, and adjust them in line with inflation

It is our opinion that these measures will be beneficial for the performance of Ontario's economy and labour market, and will ensure that a larger proportion of Ontarians share in the benefits of future growth and development.

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