

What are specific challenges youth workers face, and
what can be done to overcome these challenges?

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This week, on June 26, the provincial government in Alberta will no longer require employers to pay teenagers minimum wage¹. Instead, Bill 2 means employees under the age of 18 are only required to be paid 13 dollars as compared to the 15 dollars an adult is paid². Although this bill only applies to those under the age of majority, it will have lasting consequences for this generation throughout their adult lives. While lower pay for equal work will have various consequences, one of the greatest will be the sacrifice of post-secondary education in order to make ends meet. The teen minimum wage is the most pressing issue for today's youth as it will limit educational opportunities for both individuals and Canadian society as a whole, and we need to promote solidarity among workers to remedy this action.

The United Nations defines the youth cohort “as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years”³. This is an age where young people are graduating from high school, and possibly continuing on to a post-secondary education. However, some students may be limited in what programs they can take due to the rising cost of tuition. Youth in the north are already discouraged from going away to school due to the long distance. Citing the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, CBC reports that university tuition in Canada has tripled since the 1990s⁴. This will leave youth who can afford to go to university in more debt, and possibly discourage others who may not be able to afford it on the teen minimum wage. A panel of experts on youth employment also found limited job offerings for fresh university graduates in rural areas⁵. A teen minimum wage would not solve these problems, but it would give youth a sense of financial security. It would ease anxiety, another cited reason they might not go away to school, in a

¹ *UCP Would Cut Youth Minimum Wage to Spur Job Creation* | CBC News. CBCnews. (2019).

² Ibid

³ *Youth - Definition*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2017).

⁴ Habib, Marlene. *University Tuition Rising to Record Levels in Canada* | CBC News. CBCnews. (2013)

⁵ Canada. Expert Panel on Youth Employment. *Understanding the Realities: Youth Employment in Canada*. (2016)

turbulent part of their lives and let them plan their future with a clear head⁶. The future of our current students will reflect the future of our economy; therefore, it would be wise to invest in youth now.

Not only is the youth minimum wage hurting students right now, but it is doing the greater Canadian society a disservice in the future. Many school districts across Canada are short teachers, a position which requires a university degree, and this lack of educators is especially severe in the north⁷. In Igloolik, school could not start on the expected date for students grade five and up, because they had not filled 3 grades of teaching positions⁸. Furthermore, Nunavut will have to delay its mandatory bilingual curriculum, taught in English and Inuktitut, by a decade, as there are not enough teachers who are proficient in both languages⁹. When a panel of experts examined the barriers Indigenous youth face in the workplace, many reported: “a sense of cultural identity and pride can be a motivating factor” when looking for meaningful work¹⁰. If students miss out on valuable education now, they will be less likely to find their own place in the labour market. Those without a high school degree were about 30% less likely to be employed than their more educated peer group¹¹.

There is no one cure for solving the problem that is the teen minimum wage. Although the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects everyone in Canada from being discriminated against based on age, that protection only starts after the age of 18 in both

⁶ Ibid

⁷ *1st Day of School Delayed for Some Nunavut Students as Territory Scrambles to Fill 66 Teacher Vacancies* / CBC News. CBCnews. (2018)

⁸ Ibid

⁹ *Facing Inuit Teacher Shortages, Nunavut Education Minister Wants to Move Deadlines on Bilingual Instruction* / CBC News. CBCnews (2017)

¹⁰ Expert Panel on Youth Employment. *Understanding the Realities: Youth Employment in Canada*

¹¹ Ibid

jurisdictions where the teen minimum wage was enacted¹². Therefore, the move is legal and cannot be challenged in court. One way we as individuals can remedy the situation is supporting businesses that pay equal wages for equal work. The Star mentioned, “some Alberta businesses such as Analog Coffee, Corbeaux Bakery and Fratello Coffee Roastery” who will still be paying teen employees the same as adults¹³.

In conclusion, the youth minimum wage will not be increasing employment in Canada. Whether it is in Calgary or Igloolik, youth will suffer due to a lack of access to education. We need to support youth as a society and give them a sense of financial security as an investment in future generations. Although Bill 2 is constitutional, it will limit opportunities at all levels of the education system and the workplace. The north needs educated professionals, especially teachers. Even though there are other employment options available on the job market, we cannot downplay the importance of a university degree. An extra two dollars an hour pales in comparison to a child who believes their dreams are out of reach due to a lack of financial and educational resources.

¹² Canada. Department of Justice. "Section 15 – Equality Rights." Charterpedia (2019)

¹³ Doherty, Brennan. *Lower Minimum Wage for Teen Workers Divides Alberta Businesses*. The Star. (2019)

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