

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? What I heard at changing workplaces committee



The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has been consulting on the government's recent introduction of Bill 148.

The proposed legislation would make substantial changes to the labour laws in the province of Ontario. The proposed changes include expanding personal emergency leave to 10 days including two paid days, expanding vacation time, changes to the rules around shifts and changes to the collective bargaining rules. While these changes are substantial and important, most of the media and public discussion has been focused on a proposed increase to the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2019, a 32 per cent increase in 18 months.

The proposed changes in Bill 148 ? Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017 are substantial. Bill 148 passed first reading June 1. Understanding that the proposed amendments are significant and include many changes in Ontario labour laws; the Legislative Assembly referred Bill 148 to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to hold public hearings over the summer after first reading.

I joined the Standing Committee's meeting in Kitchener July 18. I heard from businesses leaders, labour law experts, employees and more. What is clear from these discussions is that the changes proposed are wide-ranging and complex. It reinforces to me several things. First, many businesses are concerned about what the changes will mean to their future. Many believe the 32 per cent increase in the minimum wage is coming too quickly. Many businesses felt 'blindsided' by the proposal because it was only recently that the government had been defending its plan to tie the minimum wage to inflation, as well as giving businesses ample forewarning of an increase. Some businesses emphasized that they would love to pay their staff more, but are seriously concerned that they cannot handle such a swift increase. As one presenter put it, 'I have to come up with \$1.5 million and I don't really know how I'm going to do that.'

Second, it is clear to me that many Ontarians are feeling pressure on their budget. Life has simply become more unaffordable for many families across Ontario; from hydro rates to housing prices. I heard emotional testimony from individuals who are facing immense pressure to pay the bills.

Finally it is clear that before we move ahead with these changes, the government needs to have an economic impact study so we can know what these changes mean for employees and the businesses they work for. After all, the Premier's own Advisory Panel on minimum wage found that for every 10 per cent you raise the minimum wage, youth employment goes down six per cent.

If you have comments regarding Bill 148 please contact my office at 519-941-7751 or by email at sylvia.jonesqp@pc.ola.org
Hearing your concerns on these changes will help me continue to advocate for Dufferin-Caledon.