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Wage Decision Delay Hurts Working Poor Government tells hard-working families to sit tight while it tests the winds

Winnipeg – The Manitoba government’s continuing refusal to raise the minimum wage hurts the province’s most vulnerable workers, said Todd Scarth, Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba.

According to Winnipeg Harvest, the fastest growing segment of the population using its food bank is people who hold jobs. In the last half of the 1990s alone, the percentage of household income derived from work — as opposed to social assistance — among families who depend on Harvest for food rose from 19% to 27%.

Those working at or near the minimum wage have seen the spending power of their wages steadily eroded by inflation. That process continues while the government waits to make a decision.

“The Minister claims that this is all part of a fair and open process. Yet further delays do not make the process any fairer. Low-wage industries have enormous resources to attempt to sway public opinion, while low-wage workers have none. It is getting to the point where the government is abdicating its responsibility to these workers, and its responsibility to govern,” said Scarth.

The minimum wage board held public hearings last spring, deliberated over the summer, and submitted its recommendations more than two months ago. The board submitted separate reports from both the employer and employee representatives, as well as from the Chair. Summaries of these reports were released yesterday.

Both the Chair and the employee representatives endorsed a plan to automatically raise the minimum wage according to the Low-Income Cutoff, a measure commonly used to designate the poverty line. This would be a significant and positive development, and would greatly de-politicize the process of setting the wage.

Other ideas raised in the recommendations, such as two-tier minimums for tipping, training, or non-adult workers, are unnecessary and would open the door to abuse. They should not be pursued at this time.

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