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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey





## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Thursday, November 21, 2024

• (1205)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Committee members, we are back in session for the second part, which is on the consideration of a private member's bill.

[Translation]

Welcome, Mrs. Vien.

[English]

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of Bill C-378, an act amending the Canada Labour Code regarding complaints by former employees.

We have one witness appearing for us today. It is MP Dominique Vien, the sponsor of the bill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vien, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for having me today.

I'm a bit emotional because the last time I appeared before a parliamentary committee was when Quebec tabled Bill 176 to overhaul the Act respecting Labour Standards. As part of our in-depth review, a major change was made for workers in Quebec, namely the statute of limitations for filing a complaint in cases of harassment or violence. I had realized that Quebecers had only three months to file a complaint. The decision was then taken to extend the period to two years. I will have the opportunity to show you that, currently, in Quebec, this judicious decision has been beneficial for many Quebec workers.

When I arrived here in Ottawa in 2021, my name was picked in the draw among all the MPs, and I wondered what I could possibly table as a bill. I looked at the Canada Labour Code and realized that it was out of step with what is done in Quebec, but also with what is done in the other provinces. In the case of Quebec, the statute of limitations for filing a complaint was increased from three months to two years in 2018. By the way, in Quebec, no distinction is made between current and former employees, which is not the case for employees falling under federal regulations.

Under the federal labour code, former employees of all federally regulated organizations and businesses had no window to file a complaint of harassment or violence up until 2021. There's no statute of limitations for current federally regulated employees. Former employees, however, were in a difficult position as they had no recourse. With the passage of the current government's Bill C-65, that issue has been resolved. Since the passage of Bill C-65, a three-month time frame has now been instated. You might say that three months is better than nothing, but in fact, it's almost nothing.

Bill C-378, which is being presented to you today, is a short bill, but it could have a very broad scope, meaning that former employees could at the very least benefit from what the most permissive—let's put it that way—province grants, i.e., Quebec, which offers a statute of limitations of two years instead of three months.

The government, or Parliament, I should say, is concerned about the three-month statute of limitations, which seemed too short. I say that Parliament is also concerned because the Canada Labour Code and the regulations specifically state that permission may be requested so that a former employee can be entitled to a much longer time frame. This is a kind of tacit recognition that the three-month statute of limitations is too short.

I will briefly describe what is being done outside Quebec. Five provinces, like Quebec, make no distinction between former and current employees, but they only grant a one-year period to file a claim, whereas in Quebec, it's two years. Those provinces are Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, as well as Newfoundland and Labrador. British Columbia has a six-month claim period for former employees and no time limit for current employees. The other three provinces, Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, do not offer any recourse to former employees at this time.

To me, it doesn't make sense to not give former employees an opportunity to make claims. To give former employees only three months also shows a lack of empathy, especially as we know how hard it can be for former employees, or even current employees, to come to terms with the situation, their experience and what happened to them.

Obviously, three months go by in the blink of an eye. That's way too short a time frame.

For all these reasons, I think we should do something useful and move towards giving former employees a lot more time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vien.

[*English*]

We will now move to the first round of questioning and Mrs. Gray.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Ms. Vien, and for putting forth your very impactful private member's bill.

Ms. Vien, we know that, this year, Statistics Canada reported that in Canada, 31% of men and 47% of women reported experiencing some form of harassment or sexual assault in the workplace. Worse yet, a survey last month by Traliant reported that 61% of Canadian HR professionals say harassment is a growing issue.

This Liberal government, in so many ways, doesn't focus on victims. I'm wondering if you can speak about that and about how your bill will impact people.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Psychological harassment, sexual harassment and workplace violence are not just a sign of the times. This behaviour has been going on for a long time. It needs to be stopped and stamped out. I think that, in order to do that, everyone must first be able to put a name to what is happening in their workplace.

You're absolutely right: The data is troubling. I looked at the data from the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, a well-regarded public institution in Quebec that ensures that workers are informed, compensated and protected. What you noticed in Statistics Canada's data has also been observed in Quebec.

Federally regulated businesses or organizations must submit reports to the government, and indeed, the data reveals marked increases in all kinds of workplace harassment or violence. I will choose my words carefully: It is a scourge. This is something we are seeing a lot of, whether it be in our personal lives, our lives in civil society or in any aspect of our public-facing lives, particularly on social media. The workplace is no different.

We believe that this bill provides a toolbox and sends the message that any complacency towards workplace harassment and violence is over. There must be zero tolerance for that sort of behaviour. Let's give former employees the time they need to express their views and rights in this regard, because right now, they have virtually no opportunity to do so.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you.

This is a bit of a technical question: Could your bill have an impact on current employees, or is it reserved strictly for former employees?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** That's an excellent question, Mrs. Gray, because as it stands, it depends on a person's employment status. For current employees, the bill would have no impact, as federally regulated employees are exempt from a statute of limitations. They obviously have no need to worry about such matters.

The major step forward contained in this bill is that it gives former employees more time. Right now, if you're a former employee, you have three months to file a complaint, but we don't think that's enough. Bill C-378 makes it easier for former employees to file complaints.

The bill does not contain any changes for current employees.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you very much.

We know there is a lot of Conservative leadership for workers, and a couple of pieces of legislation through colleagues. We have Bill C-228, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985. That was through our colleague MP Gladu. We have Bill C-241, an act to amend the Income Tax Act with respect to the deduction of travel expenses for tradespersons through our colleague MP Lewis. We have Bill C-409, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code regarding hours of work of flight attendants. That's through our colleague MP Rood. Then we have Bill C-318, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code with regard to adoptive and intended parents. That's through our colleague here in the room, MP Falk.

Your legislation is another piece of legislation to help workers and make a difference for them.

I'm wondering if you can speak to your legislation and what impact harassment and violence in the workplace can have on individuals?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Mrs. Gray, individuals can suffer a great deal of harm, quite frankly.

This can take the form of physical and psychological problems, such as anxiety, difficulty adjusting and periods of depression, or alcohol and substance abuse problems. Some people suffer career setbacks, up to and including job loss, and that's where this bill would be particularly effective. Sometimes, people are forced to leave their job for psychological reasons, for example because of a situation at the office that was becoming unbearable. However, when that's the case, we fall into the second category of people who had—

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vien.

Mr. Long, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to my colleagues.

MP Vien, thank you very much for doing this and for your initiative. I can certainly speak to my private member's motion on record suspensions, M-161, and MP Falk's bill, which I believe was Bill C-318.

We're all very proud of our private member's bills and, obviously, put them forth with a lot of passion.

Can you share with the committee the process you've gone through so far in the consultation? I recognize that you were previously a minister with the Quebec government. What years, MP Vien, were you a minister?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I headed four departments, the last being the Department of Labour, between 2016 and 2018, so over a period of little more than two years. I even knew your colleague Mr. Coteau, who was Ontario's Minister of Tourism at the time, when I held the same position in Quebec.

To answer the first part of your question, I would say that Quebec's experience can teach us a lot, obviously. We spoke to stakeholders, including unions, but surprisingly, not all of them wanted to make their stance on this bill public, which, it must be said, is very good for workers. Meetings were held with unions, human resources experts and victims groups, who gave us their point of view.

Ms. Viau from the Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement au travail de la province de Québec will probably appear before you. She has very concrete, almost clinical experience, having worked with employees who've encountered problems with the prescribed time frames.

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you for that.

I would like to read a quote, in which you said:

A three-month time limit seems too short for such difficult experiences. Employees who were harassed may not always realize it right away. The road is a long one between experiencing harassment, realizing what happened, living through the accompanying trauma, and deciding to file a complaint. The trauma can surface long after the incident and even long after the termination of employment.

MP Vien, you're proposing to go from three months to two years. Am I correct? Okay.

Why not one year? Why not three years? How did you come to decide on two years?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I've got nothing to hide. It's very simple, I relied on my own experience as a minister in Quebec City.

We have to be reasonable. This bill is good for employees, but we also have the employers to think of. This change to the Canada Labour Code would have an impact on businesses, even though they are supposed to implement the policy set out in the legislation

resulting from Bill C-65. They need to provide a workplace that is violence and harassment-free, which is great.

You asked me why I wanted to change the statute of limitations to two years, and it's because Quebec's experience has been positive and conclusive. At the time, stakeholders were very enthusiastic about the idea of having up to two years to file a complaint. Based on what I've heard so far, the two-year time frame is considered reasonable. In addition, very few people are deprived of their rights for having exceeded the two-year period.

That's not currently the case with employees that fall under the Canada Labour Code. Three months is okay. It's true that it's better than nothing. However, at some point, a person may realize that what they have been gone through makes them a victim of violence or harassment. By the time the person realizes that, the deadline has already passed.

What I'm saying is so patently true that Parliament has already provided a process or mechanism to offer an extension to those persons to give them more time. Parliament was already of the opinion that the three-month period might not be enough.

• (1220)

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Long.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Vien, thank you for your bill. Not surprisingly, the Bloc Québécois will support it, first because it makes it possible to align existing Quebec legislation with the Canada Labour Code. We are also concerned that three months is clearly not enough time for a former employee of an organization falling under federal jurisdiction to file a complaint for workplace harassment or violence. Sometimes it can take years to recover from serious harassment.

When you were the minister responsible for labour, you amended the Act respecting Labour Standards to make a very similar change to what you're proposing in Bill C-378, which is to give a former employee two years to file a complaint following harassment or violence in the workplace.

I'm getting to my question. You mentioned something earlier. I would like to know if you have any figures or testimony, in short, more information on the Quebec experience, which stretches back for a few years now.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you for your question.

The answer is yes.

I'm going to come back to your question more specifically, but what's unfortunate is that I've had a lot of trouble compiling information because employers currently don't have to document the cases of former employees who benefit from the three-month deadline, for example. Obviously, some former employees haven't had any problems. I'm talking about employees who did have issues.

In the regulations that set out what is expected of employers, it does not say that they must compile any information. I had trouble getting answers, for example, about the number of people who had not been able to lodge a complaint because they had missed the three-month deadline. No one keeps statistics on that. No statistics are forwarded to the government, because companies are not required to provide them. Again, if we wanted to do something useful, this bill could recommend that the government force companies to document cases.

If I may, I would like to quote Cindy Viau, executive director of the Groupe d'aide et d'information sur le harcèlement de la province de Québec. She said:

In addition, at the provincial level, we note from our experience that very few people who contact us find it difficult to initiate the complaint process within the two years set out in the Act respecting labour standards. Since the time limit was changed in 2018, we have only on very rare occasions had to explain to a victim that they had missed their deadline to file a complaint.

I can provide no better evidence than the testimony of an organization that works with victims and says that the two-year time frame I set is fair. It ticks a lot of boxes, as the expression goes, because it is reasonable and provides enough time for employees to file complaints.

Ms. Viau is much more critical towards the current three-month period, however. She tells us that a lot of employees do indeed have trouble filing complaints within that time frame, and it is almost always because of the trauma they have experienced.

• (1225)

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you very much for that explanation and that testimony. However, given what you just said about what we can learn from the Quebec experience, wouldn't you have liked your bill to include the requirement to collect data on former employees?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Actually, when we consulted the documents and reports of the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, the CNESST, we found that there was no such data, to our great surprise. Maybe the data is stored somewhere and we weren't able to access it. That said, if it were possible for legislators in Quebec City to ask employers to provide more fulsome data on former employees, that would be useful.

Since we're going through the process now, it would be advisable to—

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Why not do it here now, since Bill C-378 is being studied?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** We could. This is something I realized later in the process, when I worked on this bill, i.e., that there was very little documentation on cases where the three-month deadline had been exceeded.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** I would like to ask you a question, even though I know you partially answered it in response to my colleague.

In France, the statute of limitations has been set at six years since 2017. When you were the minister responsible for labour in Quebec, you increased the statute of limitations to two years. Now you're again proposing two years.

Why didn't you aim for an even longer period, knowing that two years is still a short time for some people? As I said at the outset, it can take years to recover from serious harassment. Why not take inspiration from even more generous provisions for employees and former employees? Why only two years?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** You say “only two years”, but that's still quite a bit more than what is extended elsewhere in Canada, which, frankly, is quite close to what is done in Quebec, culturally speaking.

The Quebec example has been conclusive. I think we need a measured approach. I'm not saying we have to go slowly, but we have to get society as a whole behind the change we want to make to the statute of limitations. I did look at what was being done in other countries, mostly G7 countries, that are—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

[English]

Madam Zarrillo, go ahead for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you so much, MP Vien, for this amendment. This amendment to the Canada Labour Code is a necessary and overdue measure to protect workers from the lasting impacts of harassment and violence. These are the measures that, for decades, New Democrats—the only labour party in the country—have been fighting for, and they would certainly hold employers accountable, empower former employees and align with the NDP's fundamental principles of justice and fairness, so I want to thank you.

We must also recognize the broader context in which this bill would operate, in light of the ongoing Black class action lawsuit with the federal government, which is a landmark legal action addressing systemic discrimination and harassment faced by Black employees within the federal public service. For decades these workers have reported experiencing pervasive racism, barriers to advancement and a hostile work environment that undermine their dignity and professional growth. The lack of protections in the Labour Code has meant that Black employees had to create their own class action lawsuit to seek the kind of justice and comprehensive redress that New Democrats know workers need and deserve. This highlights the urgent need for legal protections and accountability measures by extending the time frame to file complaints and hold employers accountable.

New Democrats believe this bill will provide indirect support for those aims of the class action lawsuit, which would ensure that those who have suffered long-standing discrimination would have the opportunity to seek redress and contribute to the creation of a fair and more inclusive workplace for all, which I'm sure all of us in committee want.



I'm worried, MP Vien, that the current delays that the Conservatives are perpetuating in the House of Commons are slowing down this and other legislation. What is the timeline in which this change to the Labour Code could become a reality, and what do you feel is the impact on workers of the House of Commons delays?

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** You're setting a trap that I won't fall into.

Bill C-378 is obviously extremely important. I support it with all my experience and all my heart.

Federally regulated employees currently have three months to share their perspective, which isn't long enough. Obviously, the sooner this bill is passed, the better. There are currently procedures in the House of Commons, so there may be delays.

Moving ahead will constitute a major step forward for federally regulated employees and former employees.

[English]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I agree, and I think that there are many private members' bills that are very important and that MPs have passion for and want to get moved forward. I hope that we can see this move forward and that the Conservatives make some decisions to get more work done.

In the meantime, we need mental health supports, which are necessary for all workers, not just federal workers. I'm wondering, MP Vien, did you hear, during consultation, the need for accessible, affordable mental health supports in Canada? Does the government, in general, need to expand mental health supports for Canadians? I know they've committed, but we haven't seen the money flowing with any speed.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Ms. Zarrillo, in all honesty, we didn't discuss additional funding or services that should be rolled out as part of this bill. The work focused more on the feasibility of the type of bill tabled and on the potential gains.

That said, the passage of this bill will undeniably make a significant and positive contribution to improving the mental health of employees. However, we didn't go down that road. The people whom we spoke to didn't ask us about these issues.

[English]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** During the initial tabling of this bill, a number of gaps were identified by New Democrats. One of them was accountability, or a check back to see if this was working in terms of improving the lives and work experience of workers.

Do you have any comments on the acceptance of an amendment around expanding having some accountability in the bill?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you for your question.

Yes, the member for Terrebonne and I discussed this a bit earlier in our conversation. I'm not a lawyer. However, I think that the regulations should be changed. That would be up to the executive.

If we could provide a recommendation to make companies more accountable to the government so that they document the files involving former employees, I think that this would be a good thing. The committee will no doubt prepare a report.

This would really give us a chance to see how things are going on the ground and how many people have used this extension. I should point out that the deadline will be extended to two years. The deadline is currently three months, but it will be two years.

It would be good to have more data on this issue. I think that the accountability aspect would be better supported.

• (1235)

[English]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Just talking about the—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo. We've gone over quite a bit.

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Vien, for being here today.

I do want to make a note off the top. I found that last question about accountability from the NDP quite comical. Several times in this committee, we Conservatives have moved amendments to government legislation—one that comes to mind is the \$10-a-day day care, which they voted against—so I would take that for what it is from the NDP.

All employees deserve respect and assurance of safety within their workplaces. I want to thank you for taking the time and doing the work to advance this important piece of legislation, which empowers workers and advocates on behalf of those who have experienced workplace harassment or violence.

As has been discussed, Bill C-378 proposes to extend the current three-month deadline for former employees to file a harassment complaint to a full two years. Under the current framework, while the extension is possible, the burden of proof rests on the victim to demonstrate why they were unable to meet the original deadline, requiring them to prove that their circumstances made it difficult or impossible to file a complaint within that initial time frame.

Can you please comment on why it is inappropriate to put that burden on the victim from that workplace?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** The victims are already traumatized when they file a complaint or a notice of an incident or occurrence with their employer or the person responsible and when they ask for more time on top of the current three months, for example—

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** On a point of order, I'm having a hard time hearing the translation.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** That's another reason why I try to speak slowly. It helps.

A burden of proof comes into play.

When a former employee wants to use the extra time provided by the regulations to exceed the three-month limit, it means that they were unable to meet this deadline. Mrs. Falk, it's an uphill battle.

You must first prove that you experienced trauma or had a certain health issue that prevented you from filing a notice of occurrence or complaint.

It doesn't stop there. You must provide documents and perhaps even visit a notary and make a sworn statement. You must provide medical documents. There are all sorts of requests, documents and sworn statements. It's in front of me. Two full pages of requests are made to the former employee. This may be enough to discourage them from filing a complaint.

When you have post-traumatic stress disorder or are facing difficulties, you end up with depression or anxiety that you didn't have before. It's also complicated when you need to take all these steps. The burden of proof is currently placed on the shoulders of this person. I'm sure that not a single parliamentarian here wants that. However, I think that this is where things stand today.

If we could extend this deadline and remove this burden of proof and these additional hurdles, it would obviously make the procedure and the process easier for these former employees.

I don't know whether I fully answered your question.

• (1240)

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Yes, absolutely.

I think this is something, too, that society is continuing to unpack, that processing trauma isn't black and white. It's very grey, and you can't really put a timeline on processing that.

Would you say, from your perspective, that this current three-month deadline is actually a discouragement to those who would be coming forward with a complaint, in the sense that it's just not enough time? I haven't even thought this through. Would you say it's not a big deal? As they're processing it afterwards, do you think maybe complainants would look at that three months and say “no”?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** In any case, I wouldn't be surprised.

The three-month time limit is a major obstacle, especially since these people may not even know that a deadline exists. They learn about it only when they decide to file a complaint. I'm talking about accounts from people around me who experienced this. When they wanted to file a complaint, they found out about a deadline and then, whoops, the date had passed. This is the case for a number of people.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Vien, thank you for your work and, of course, your passion.

First, I believe that the Quebec legislation was passed in 2018. Is that right?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Exactly.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Okay.

What outcomes have been seen in Quebec after the passage of the bill? Have there been any positive outcomes? It has been six years. Has Quebec had time to form an opinion on the impact?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Good question.

Unfortunately, we haven't received much data. Our only data comes from the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail, or CNESST, which manages all these files in Quebec.

We managed to find a great deal of data confirming—this isn't news to anyone—the increase in workplace violence, for example. Of course, we're analyzing the data to determine the types of trauma experienced in the workplace. However, there isn't much data on the extension of the time frame to two years. The data available comes from organizations such as Cindy Viau's group, which I referred to earlier this morning.

Ms. Viau told us that Quebec's experience with the two-year deadline has been conclusive. Very few people come to her organization and realize that they have run out of time to file a complaint. Her organization receives very few cases of this nature. In other words, the two-year deadline works. However, she pointed out that the three-month time limit meant that many people actually exceeded the deadline. She recommended that we introduce a two-year deadline, as is currently the case in Quebec.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** In your response to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you spoke briefly about the experience of other democratic or G7 countries, such as France.

Can you elaborate on this?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Of course.

We looked at experiences outside the federal jurisdiction. These experiences are informative. However, a number of them are also complicated. In the case of harassment in the workplace, labour legislation procedures have been combined with criminal proceedings. The level of trauma experienced has also been graded. Our situation isn't quite the same. Our approach is a bit more cautious. I would recommend that the House proceed in stages. Before, we had nothing. Then, we had a three-month deadline. Even though we don't have any data, we know that the two-year deadline works well in Quebec. Why not have a two-year deadline at the federal level?

If by chance we decide later that two years isn't enough, we can perhaps take a look at the situation in other countries, such as France or Belgium. However, I think that we need to take a cautious and reasonable approach, as I said earlier. These changes also affect companies.

I think that two years is a long time compared with the current deadline. This doesn't mean that we can't change the deadline later. If we do change it, I think that we'll be increasing it, not decreasing it.

• (1245)

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I would like you to talk about consultations. I'm sure that you held a fairly extensive consultation on this issue. How many organizations did you consult? Were the views on the two-year deadline unanimous or divided? Were any concerns raised?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** First, I would like to point out that the National Assembly unanimously approved these changes. Moreover, civil society also fully supported these changes.

As I told you earlier, we contacted many groups. A number of them were reluctant to speak very openly on this issue. They felt that there wasn't enough time or that there weren't enough people. They had their own reasons. However, I can tell you that I didn't meet a single person who clearly told me that it wasn't a good idea.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I'm not surprised.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Vien, we spoke earlier about the fact that, while preparing and introducing this bill, you realized that companies weren't required to collect information on their former employees.

Over the course of your work, did you make any other findings along these lines regarding ways to improve the Canada Labour Code?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I would say that the main finding was this one, which concerned the collection of information. As I told our colleague, Mrs. Falk, if we could give—

Sorry. I lost my train of thought. I don't know whether it's because people are talking on the other side.

[English]

**The Chair:** You're interrupting Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

[Translation]

You have the floor again.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Could you please repeat the end of your question, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné?

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Of course.

My question concerns the findings that you made when preparing your bill. Obviously, you held consultations and made a noteworthy observation about the lack of a requirement for employers to collect data on former employees.

Did you make any other findings?

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** As I told Mrs. Falk earlier, it might be a good idea to review the regulations in order to ease the burden on people who are probably already traumatized or who are victims and who need to show that they experienced trauma or a health issue. The documents required even include a sworn statement at a notary's office. I'm still wondering why. Maybe it's to make sure that the person is telling the truth. I don't know, but it seems cumbersome. When I saw this in my research, I found that this process could be reviewed, corrected and streamlined. Obviously, you must show proof of your trauma and health issues. You can't claim to be a victim from one day to the next. I agree that some verifications are necessary. However, perhaps this is too much.

• (1250)

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** My pleasure.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

[English]

Ms. Zarrillo, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Chair.

My NDP colleague Matthew Green outlined in the initial debate on this bill that coordination with stakeholders, including provincial bodies, is important, since the labour laws vary significantly, as you outlined in your presentation around the timelines.

How can this bill be amended to assist in coordinating with provincial labour laws to ensure consistent protection for all federal workers right across Canada?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Ms. Zarrillo, by passing this bill, we'll be giving a message and an impetus to a number of provinces across Canada. A number of those provinces are in a good position. In some ways, they do much more than the Canada Labour Code does right now.

I emphasized earlier the need to improve information gathering to ensure greater transparency and accountability. This will also provide food for thought for legislators regarding what works, what doesn't work and what needs to change.

Passing the bill would give an impetus to the various jurisdictions in Canada. It would be good if we could all get on more or less equal footing with regard to former employees.

[English]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I want to go back to the idea of data. It's been mentioned twice in our interactions today.

On the data side, how can privacy be protected? How can you see that data being stored, analyzed or shared, while still protecting the privacy of employees?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I'm not involved in the operations of the companies or the federal agency that receives this data. However, I trust that the data is already encrypted and protected. I have data on hand from the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail and from the annual report prepared by the Quebec government. This data provides an overview of the number of cases.

Unless I misunderstood your question, I don't think that we're delving into considerations that could jeopardize confidentiality.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

[English]

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** That's what I'm thinking about. It's the personal information of employees.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

We have Mr. Aitchison for four minutes, and then we'll conclude with Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Aitchison.

**Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mrs. Vien. This is a good and reasonable bill.

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Aitchison:** I think all the questions I had have already been asked.

Is there a specific point that hasn't been made that you'd like to make at this point?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien:** I think that we covered a great deal of ground in terms of what this bill can do. Psychological harassment is insidious, and so is sexual harassment. The boundaries are blurred.

I was reading about the violence reported in organizations. The things that can happen in some workplaces defy comprehension.

Mr. Aitchison, I applaud the fact that all federally regulated employees don't have a deadline. I welcome that. I think that it's a great step forward for a society.

Quebec isn't as advanced. The deadline is two years. Here, it's better. However, when it comes to former employees, the situation is worse here than in Quebec.

I think that we could all say that we don't need to carry out long studies to understand that three months isn't much time. I could refer you to many academic studies. Everyone knows that three months isn't enough. Let's do this together. I think that all parties agree on this issue. There's no problem.

That's why I don't want to talk about seven or ten years right now. Companies also need time to adapt to everything, to buy into the idea and to understand the situation and the reason for moving in this direction.

I think that this would give everyone the opportunity to take a reasonable and moderate step forward. Let's take the time to look at the developments in this area and to see whether they have produced the desired results and whether we're on the right track. If any changes are needed, we'll make them. I think that it would be reasonable to proceed in this manner.

• (1255)

[English]

**Mr. Scott Aitchison:** Thank you.

I think that the operative word here is “reasonable”, and I think you've made that point very well.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I'll give my time to Mrs. Gray.

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mrs. Gray.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you very much.

I want to thank Ms. Vien again for a very good and well-thought-out bill. Thank you very much.

We're in the last couple of minutes of this meeting here, so I'd like to bring another issue forward that's very important. This is in relation to the “2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada”, which stated that nearly 1.4 million children live in poverty in Canada, or roughly one in five children, and that this is “the largest annual increase in child poverty on record”. There were increases two years in a row.

It went on, “Canada saw...358,520 more children living in poverty than during the height of the pandemic in 2020.” We know that this is across every province and territory.

Meanwhile, as well, the cost of food also has increased 35% since 2015, and the percentage of children living in food-insecure households also rose in 2023, to 28.5%. These are very shocking numbers.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I would like to move the following very short motion that has been put on notice. I move:

Given that recently published numbers from Campaign 2000 indicate that between 2021-2022, Canada experienced the largest jump in child poverty on record, the committee report its concern to the House.

I'm sure that all members of this committee can approve of this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** The motion is in order, and Ms. Gray was in a position to move it.

For discussion, I have Madam Zarrillo and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

Madam Zarrillo, go ahead on the motion by Ms. Gray.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate this motion from the Conservative side.

Campaign 2000 and other civil society advocates have been at the forefront of activism to end poverty for families in Canada. This is clear with this latest report card, and previously we have seen this work in their successful efforts to protect the Canada child benefit from clawbacks. At the time, Campaign 2000 urged the government to take the lead in entering into agreements with provinces and territories to ensure that families wouldn't see this needed income clawed back. We're seeing the same problem emerge now, though, with the Canada disability benefit.

The data this motion refers to shows how children with disabilities and their families are disproportionately experiencing higher poverty rates. We must ensure that, just like the Canada child benefit, the Canada disability benefit doesn't face clawbacks, or we will only see child poverty get worse for the most vulnerable.

I have an amendment, Mr. Chair. It reads:

Given that recently published numbers from Campaign 2000 indicate that between 2021-2022, Canada experienced the largest jump in child poverty on record; that children with disabilities, particularly young women and girls with disabilities, are disproportionately experiencing higher rates of poverty; that clawbacks to benefits perpetuate the cycle of poverty for people living with disabilities; that the Canada disability benefit has not yet been safeguarded from clawbacks and would provide needed relief for people with disabilities and their families experiencing poverty; and that, in the opinion of the committee, it is imperative that the government take the lead in engaging with provinces and territories to ensure that the Canada disability benefit does not face clawbacks by ensuring similar exemptions as were secured for the Canada child benefit by Campaign 2000, the committee report this and its concern over rising child poverty to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

We now have an amendment on the floor to Mrs. Gray's motion.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you had your hand up.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I haven't seen the amendment in text form, Mr. Chair. I see that it's one o'clock, so I would be happy to take up the matter another time or at the next meeting, or whenever colleagues wish to raise it again.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Is it the wish—

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just want to ensure.... The amendments have been sent to the clerk in both official languages, and I would like them to go out immediately, please.

**The Chair:** You're correct, Ms. Zarrillo. They will be circulated. However, at this time, you've moved an amendment, and I am now beyond the hour.

Is it the wish of the committee to adjourn?

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** No, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Then I'll ask the clerk to call a vote on the adjournment of the meeting.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.





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