



MEDIA RELEASE

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Law Commission of Ontario speaks about Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work in Belleville on Nov 28

Belleville/December 9, 2013 – Jobs and employment opportunities have changed in Ontario, but the laws governing employment have not. Patricia Hughes of the Law Commission of Ontario and Karen Dick of the Worker's Action Centre spoke of these challenges at the Annual General Meeting of the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre.

According to the Law Commission of Ontario's recent report, *Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work*, full-time, continuous employment that provides workers with access to good wages and benefits is no longer the predominant form of employment. Employees are now more likely to be engaged in precarious work, which the LCO defines as work with little or no job security, few if any benefits, and minimal control over working conditions.

The Law Commission identifies precarious work as a concern not only for workers but for society at large. Precarious work leads to a greater risk of injury and affects family relationships and community engagement.

Locally, the East Central Ontario Training Board (ECOTB) raises serious concerns about the precariousness of self employment. Their data supports that self-employed workers in Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington counties make only a little more than half of the provincial average wage of other self-employed people. They may not be earning enough to provide a living wage.

Patricia Hughes, Executive Director of the Law Commission, states that "Vulnerability of workers derives from social conditions, not from personal attributes". In its report the Law Commission makes 47 short, medium and long term recommendations aimed at addressing the social conditions that face workers. Among the recommendations are proposed changes to and increased enforcement of laws that protect workers, such as the *Employment Standards Act*, as well as a review of minimum wage legislation, and increased safety protections for workers. The Law Commission also recommends greater government co-ordination for on-the-job training and education programs.

The Workers' Action Centre, a grassroots worker's advocacy organization based in Toronto, echoes the Law Commission's concerns about the laws governing workers in Ontario. The Centre states, "The laws covering workers are outdated. And the government is not doing enough to enforce the weak laws that do exist." The Workers' Action Centre seeks to change these conditions by building a movement to fight for better wages and working conditions. The Centre is currently campaigning to raise the minimum wage to \$14 per hour and to stop "wage theft," a term that describes a broad range of illegal employer practices, including not paying employees for all hours they have worked, not paying the minimum wage and not paying overtime.

Deirdre McDade is the Acting Executive Director of CALC. "There's a growing concern that workers locally are feeling the effects of precarious work. Laws such as the *Employment Standards Act* are not effective in dealing with the kinds of problems that arise in situations such as employment through a temporary placement agency". Legal needs of low- and moderate-income workers are not being met. We felt that inviting Dr. Hughes to speak about the findings of the LCO report and hearing directly from the Worker's Action Centre would provide an excellent opportunity to start a discussion about local issues" says McDade.

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The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre is a community legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. The clinic was founded in 1980 and serves low income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington counties. The clinic's main office is in Belleville, with satellite locations in Amherstview, Trenton, Picton, Napanee, Bancroft and Madoc.