

City of New Westminster adopts first-ever living wage policy in Canada

(Vancouver) In a unanimous city council vote Monday, New Westminster became the first municipality in Canada to adopt a living wage policy. The policy requires that both direct City employees and contract employees be paid at or above an hourly family living wage, which is calculated annually by the Living Wage for Families Campaign and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

City Councillor Jaimie McEvoy, who initially brought forward the policy, said the city was especially concerned about child poverty. "It was disconcerting to learn that over half of the children who live in poverty in BC have a parent who works full-time. At the end of the day, for people who work for the city on contract, we want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem."

New Westminster joins over 140 US cities and scores of British cities that have living wage bylaws on their books. The Living Wage concept is receiving a lot of attention by policy makers worldwide as effective anti-poverty tool. The US Federal Government is considering using it as part of the criteria for awarding stimulus contracts and it has been included in the election manifesto of the ruling Labour party in the current British general election campaign.

New Westminster's decision underscores the fact that the living wage is now being taken seriously here in Canada as well. This is especially important given Canada has one of the highest rates of low-wage workers among rich countries, according to the OECD.

The Living Wage for Families Campaign and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives congratulate New Westminster City Council for taking national leadership on poverty reduction by adopting this policy.

The campaign calls on large public and private sector employers to pay a family living wage. "A living wage is the difference between severe financial stress and a decent quality of life," says Seth Klein, Director of the CCPA's BC Office. "Families should not have to make impossible choices, such as whether to buy clothes or heat the house, feed the children or pay the rent."

The 2008 living wage calculation reflects basic costs of living for a family of four with two young children living in Metro Vancouver (with both parent working full-time). The full calculation is detailed in "Working for a Living Wage: Making Paid Work Meet Basic Family Needs in Vancouver and Victoria in 2008".

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For more information about the living wage, visit <http://livingwageforfamilies.ca>.