



July 14, 2010

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The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Clement:

**Re: Labour Market Information and the 2011 Long-Form Census
Questionnaire**

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) requests that you, as the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada, revisit your decision to cancel the mandatory long-form census questionnaire. By discontinuing the long-form census and replacing it with a new voluntary questionnaire, it will become more difficult for governments at all levels to develop evidence-based public policy responses to changing demographic conditions.

Like the majority of nations, our population is undergoing tremendous demographic, economic and social changes. A voluntary questionnaire, even with attempts to increase the response rate, is less reliable and will mean that many equity-seeking groups and low-income households will likely be counted out. The result will be an incomplete picture of the country, the workforce and our communities.

In a knowledge-based economy reliable information is essential for public policy development. Access to accurate, timely and comprehensive information such as labour market data is critical for the development of economic and social policies which support the labour market and workers in perilous times. In Canada, the foundation of the labour market information provided by Statistics Canada is the mandatory long-form census questionnaire, which is carried out every five years.

The Census is much more than just a head count. With its 53 additional questions, the long-form questionnaire provides the fullest and richest source of information on Canada's population, labour market and income history. This includes a detailed profile of the labour market activity of Canadians, such as information on labour force participation, employment (full-time/part-time), unemployment, income and earnings during the previous year.



This information, based on a sample of 20% of the population, can be broken down many different useful ways, including age, sex, ethnicity, visible minority status, Aboriginal status, level of education, field of study, occupation, industry and by small areas. This makes it possible, for example, to estimate the number of racialized immigrant millwrights or women plumbers under 35 in Fort McMurray. Such detailed information lies well beyond the capabilities of the Labour Force Survey, which relies on a much smaller sample survey. Only a large sample size based on a mandatory questionnaire like the Census long-form questionnaire can achieve this level of precision.

With this information, labour market stakeholders have access to information that is key to their ongoing activities. For instance, employers and unions have access to labour market information such as hourly wages by occupation in a specific industry in a town, region or province. This information is crucial in the negotiations of wages that meet the needs of Canadian workers while considering overall labour market trends. Also, many government departments, such as HRDSC, use this information to find the "prevalent wages" paid to Canadian workers in a specific occupation of selected areas so that when temporary migrant workers are brought to Canada, they are paid a level of compensation equivalent to Canadian workers.

The quality of the statistical data means employment equity goals can be measured. Employers and unions know how well or poorly the diversity of their workplaces measure up against the available labour market pool because of the detailed census data the mandatory long-form provides.

Provincial and local governments, as well as key stakeholders, use the long-form census data to evaluate labour supply and potential labour shortages in specific occupations and areas, and they adjust their programs and activities accordingly. For instance, the provincial ministries of education, colleges and universities can reevaluate their programs based on labour market needs and on demographic trends. The same applies to investors when they evaluate labour market supply and availability of skilled workers in a selected area. Finally, this information is crucial to understand the integration of recent immigrants and racialized workers in our society. The source and the importance of immigration are key factors for the net labour force growth in recent history and our overall economic and societal performance. The mandatory long-form census is the only source of information that evaluates the integration of racialized workers in the labour market across Canada, and in large cities or in rural areas.

A recent study examining labour market information in Canada completed by a panel of experts led by Don Drummond, former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the TD Bank Financial Group, and a former Associate Deputy Minister of Finance Canada, concluded that:

"There is a need to expand coverage of labour market information to include a job vacancy survey and an overall labour price index. Better data on wages and total compensation are needed to inform the labour market choices of employers and employees." (Source: Page V. *Working Together to Build a Better Labour Market Information System for Canada, Final report, 2009*)

In our view, eliminating the mandatory long-form census questionnaire would actually reduce, not expand, the labour market information currently available. This is directly contrary to the needs of the key labour market stakeholders as reported by Drummond's study.

The mandatory Census long-form questionnaire is the most reliable source of labour market information for many socio-demographic groups and provides detailed information at all level of geography, even down to neighbourhoods. What we need is more labour market information, not a reduction or the elimination of sources of labour market information. A voluntary questionnaire will serve only to reduce the reliability of this vital information.

Sincerely,



Kenneth V. Georgetti
President

cc: CLC Officers and Executive Assistants
CLC Executive Council