Submission To

the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Bill C – 243 An Act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy

Presented by

Canada’s Building Trades Unions

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Who are We?

This submission is made on behalf of Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU), we are the International Unions that have jurisdiction in the construction, maintenance and fabrication portions of Canada's Construction Industry (we will use Construction as the generic for the Industry even though it is much more than simply the 'building' of something). This industry is found in every Canadian city, town and village and our more than 500,000 members are employed constructing everything from a garden shed through to the biggest buildings in Canada, virtually every refinery, generating station, nuclear plant and such commercial and institutional construction that it includes roads, bridges, hospitals and all forms of civic infrastructure. Our work is not just done on site but is done in a number of facilities that provide modules or other components that are incorporated into the structures that we work on. Finally, once structures are built we are employed in their renovation, maintenance and repurposing. Canada's Building Trades Unions represent members who work in more than 60 different trades and occupations, and generate 14 per cent of Canada's GDP.

The International Craft Unions that compose CBTU are:

- International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers/Association internationale des poseurs d'isolants
- International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers /Fraternité internationale des charbonniers, constructeurs de navire en fer, forgerons, forgeurs et aides
- International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers /Union internationale des briqueteurs et métiers connexes
- United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America / Fraternité unie des charpentiers et menuisiers d'Amérique
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers / Fraternité internationale des ouvriers en électricité
- International Union of Elevator Constructors / Union internationale des constructeurs d'ascenseurs
- International Union of Operating Engineers / Union internationale des opérateurs-ingénieurs
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers/Association internationale des travailleurs en ponts, en fer structural, ornemental et renforcement ferrailleurs

Labourers' International Union of North America / Union internationale des journaliers d'Amérique du Nord

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades/Fraternité internationale des peintres et métiers connexes

Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association of the United States and Canada

Association internationale des ouvriers plâtriers, cimentiers applicateurs et tireurs de joints

Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers / Association internationale des travailleurs du métal en feuilles

International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America / Fraternité international d'Amériques des camionneurs, chauffeurs, préposés d'entrepôts et aides

United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada / Association unie des compagnons et apprentis de l'industrie de la plomberie et de la tuyauterie des États-Unis et du Canada

**What we do and why we are interested in this Committee Review?**

Canada’s Building Trades Unions represent workers that build, maintain, renovate and eventually replace infrastructure of all types and sizes. We strive to create a safe workplace for all workers. We are the workforce that builds Canada and we are a collection of unions that – with our contractor partners – invest over $300 million in private sector money to fund and operate over 175 apprenticeship training and education facilities across Canada that produce the safest, most highly trained and productive skilled craft workers found anywhere in the world. Through initiatives like Build Together ([www.buildtogether.ca](http://www.buildtogether.ca)), we identify barriers that exist for underrepresented groups and actively engage with our stakeholders to level the playing field.

Removing barriers and addressing the issue of maternity leave is critical for the attraction and retention of women in the construction industry. Currently, women make up four per cent of the industry, a number we expect to see grow to fill the expected skilled labour shortage, but we need women to be able to confidently go to work and not put themselves or their pregnancy at risk.

The nature of work in construction can put the health of the mother or child at risk, and under the current system, there is neither the option or flexibility needed for women to
consult with their doctors to determine when they should leave their job, without facing the loss of a paycheque – a financial hardship that many women cannot afford. Women are hiding their pregnancy and – in some cases- miscarrying because they need to keep working to collect a paycheque.

**Recommendation:**

**Canada’s Building Trades Unions Support Bill C-243 and recognize the need for a national maternity leave strategy**

Canada’s Building Trades Unions Support Bill C-243 and urges the Federal Government to take the necessary steps to implement a national maternity leave strategy that will address the larger issue of leveling the playing field for men and women in the workforce.

The nature of work in construction can put the health of the mother or child at risk, and under the current system, there is neither the option or flexibility needed for women to consult with their doctors to determine when they should leave their job, without facing the loss of a paycheque – a financial hardship that many women cannot afford. Women are hiding their pregnancy and – in some cases- miscarrying because they need to keep working to collect a paycheque.

The amendments to the *Employment Insurance Act* the Bill is a band-aid solution to a larger issue, and in the end only allows the parent less time with their child. The changes are a stop gap measure which will negatively affect women disproportionately than their male counterparts.

Statistics show that where programs exist – like in Quebec with the Safe Maternity Experience Program and with the recent implementation of the International Iron Workers (http://www.impact-net.org/member-programs/ironworkers/maternity-program) “Pregnancy (Pre-Delivery/Birth)” Program - a very small percentage of eligible candidates actually use the program, less than .40% in Quebec and 0.01% of the Ironworker membership. While these gaps exist under the current system, the usage and cost will be minimal, however addressing these gaps is critical in making a big difference in the skilled trades sector.
Conclusion

Canada’s Building Trades Unions Support Bill C-243 and urges the Federal Government to take the necessary steps to implement a national maternity leave strategy that will address the larger issue of leveling the playing field for men and women in the workforce.

The CBTU and our affiliated unions are prepared to do the right thing, including the work of the Ironworkers and hiring a consultant to navigate the bureaucracy within the ESDC and Service Canada. A national maternity leave strategy is needed and is what we expect to see from the Federal Government moving forward. We are ready at any reasonable time to assist in consultations with regards to moving this Bill forward.

All of which is respectfully submitted

[Signature]

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