

May 15, 2014

Hon. Jason Kenney, PC, MP
325 East Block
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Re: Proposing “grandfathering” for TFWs already in the country

Dear Minister Kenney:

Over the past two weeks, many business groups have been pressuring you to lift the moratorium on the use of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in the food service sector. From our perspective, this would be a mistake because the evidence clearly shows that the program is displacing Canadians, driving down wages and distorting the Canadian labour market. If anything, we think that the moratorium should be extended to all other low-wage streams of the TFW program – and made permanent.

However, while we think that the TFW program should be scrapped in its current form, we feel strongly that something needs to be done to help the thousands and thousands of TFWs who are already in the country. These workers have done nothing wrong. They came to our country in good faith and with high hopes. They are just as much victims of bad public policy as the Canadians who have been displaced by the program whose wages have been suppressed.

With this in mind, I would like to make a proposal: we think your government should close off all low-wage streams of the TFW program going forward, but let the foreign workers who are already in Canada stay. Most importantly, we believe these workers should be granted permanent residency and eventually citizenship. As permanent residents or citizens, these workers will have full mobility rights within the Canadian labour market, meaning it will be much more difficult for employers to use them as pawns to drive down wages and conditions on individual worksites or across sectors of the economy.

Closing off the low-wage streams of the TFW program and granting permanent residency to the TFWs already in Canada will accomplish three important things:

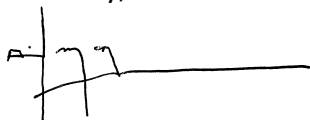
1. It will put all participants in the Canadian labour market on equal footing. It is most certainly NOT in the broad interest of the Canadian public to have a labour market divided into two segments: one with full rights, including the right to mobility, and another with constrained rights, including limits on mobility. Closing off the TFW program and granting permanent residency to the workers already here, will re-establish balance and fairness in the Canadian labour market.

2. It will go a long way towards correcting what is, essentially, an historic injustice. For generations, Canada has been a beacon for immigrants seeking to create a better life for themselves and their families. But the TFW program is not immigration, it is exploitation. By closing off the program and granting permanent residency to TFWs already in the country, we could re-establish our reputation as a nation that welcomes, instead of exploits, newcomers.

3. It will encourage businesses and governments to focus on the REAL solutions to meeting the needs of the Canadian labour market: training, flexibility on compensation and conditions and REAL immigration. Instead of relying on cheap, vulnerable and exploitable workers, governments and businesses will have to do what they should have been doing all along, which is nurturing, developing and supporting our domestic labour force.

For your information, I'm attaching a copy of a recent statement from the AFL on your department's Moratorium on TFWs in the food service sector. I am also formally requesting a meeting with you so we can discuss the AFL's proposal for "grandfathering" TFWs who are already in the country. Given the fact that so many TFWs are currently being let go as a result of the moratorium and are facing the prospect of deportation, I would like to have this conversation with you sooner rather than later.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gil McGowan', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gil McGowan
President
Alberta Federation of Labour

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