

Opening statement

Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights – Employment Equity in the Federal Public Service

Monday, February 2, 2026

(Check against delivery)

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the members of the committee for the invitation to appear before you today.

My name is Sydney Holmes. I am a member of the National Executive Committee of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, or CAPE, one of the largest public sector unions in Canada. I am joined today by Mireille Vallière, Labour Relations Officer with CAPE.

CAPE represents more than 25,000 professionals across the federal public service, including policy analysts, members of the Library of Parliament, employees of the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, civilian members of the RCMP, and translators and interpreters. I would like to acknowledge the interpreters who make these proceedings accessible in both official languages, often while facing well-documented health and safety challenges. We thank them for their professionalism and commitment to democracy.

CAPE welcomes the committee's study on employment equity statistics, the modernization of the *Employment Equity Act*, and efforts to safeguard equity during workforce adjustment. These issues are deeply connected. Progress on equity is fragile and can be quickly reversed during periods of fiscal restraint and organizational change.

Current data show some improvement, but persistent gaps remain. Racialized workers, Black employees, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples continue to be underrepresented at senior levels. While hiring has improved at entry levels, advancement and retention lag. Workforce adjustment processes risk disproportionately impacting equity-deserving groups when decisions lack a strong equity lens and transparent data. Often the adverse impact only becomes visible once the cuts have been made.

As we observe Black History Month, it is important to acknowledge the lived realities of Black federal public sector workers, who continue to face systemic barriers, including limited access to acting opportunities and overrepresentation in lower-level classifications. Employment equity must translate into real improvements in career outcomes and leadership opportunities.

Pay equity is another essential pillar of employment equity, particularly in the lens of gender justice. While the *Pay Equity Act* represents progress, implementation has been uneven and slow. Many workers, particularly women in professional and language-based occupations, have yet to see results. Pay equity must be ongoing, transparent, and enforced to prevent wage gaps from re-emerging.

Gender justice also requires addressing realities long overlooked in workplace policy, including menopause and perimenopause. For many workers, these medical phases have significant health impacts yet remain stigmatized and unsupported. An equitable public service must include accommodations, flexibility, and awareness.

Overall, CAPE offers three recommendations:

- First, modernize the *Employment Equity Act* to strengthen accountability, expand designated groups, improve intersectional data, increase central agency oversight, and introduce consequences for non-compliance.
- Second, embed employment equity protections into all workforce adjustment processes through mandatory equity impact assessments with union involvement.
- Finally, fully implement and enforce pay equity and gender-inclusive workplace policies, including perimenopause and menopause-related accommodations.

In closing, employment equity is the cornerstone of a fair, effective, representative, and credible public sector. In uncertain times, the federal government must uphold and strengthen, not weaken, its commitments. CAPE is ready to work with Parliament and stakeholders to protect and advance this progress.

Thank you, and we welcome your questions.