

98.8 BANKING SERVICES AND RULES FOR DISCLOSURE

Whereas, the ability to access financial services such as, bank accounts and cheque cashing services, is essential for operating in modern society; and
Whereas, low income people are not always able to access financial services and may pay proportionately high service costs when they do; and
Whereas, credit, which is necessary to most successful business enterprises, does not appear to be available on an equitable basis; and
Whereas, there are different and sometimes innovative types of credit suited to different enterprises; and
Whereas, banking services are so important to the Canadian economy that they fill the role of public utility, yet are only accountable to shareholders; and
Whereas, the lack of responsiveness of financial institutions to consumer concerns, coupled with the inability of advocacy groups to raise funds to support themselves means that consumers have little effect in changing the ways the financial institutions operate; and
Whereas, the proportion on the National Debt owed outside Canada is sharply falling; and
Whereas, there are significant flaws in the current Canadian banking ombudsman system, which is presently staffed by bank employees; and
Whereas, the financial institutions enjoy substantial privileges and protections under Canadian law, but have not been accountable to consumers; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that National Council of Women of Canada urge the Government of Canada to:

1. Require that financial institutions ensure that all Canadians, have access to affordable banking services; and
2. Ensure that credit for projects designed on sound business practice be available to Canadians on an equitable basis (i.e. low income Canadians, projects designed to benefit local communities and for people wishing to start innovative technological enterprise) from:
Banks and near banks (i.e. credit unions); Venture capital programs Peer-lending enterprises (such as the "Calmeadow Foundation"); and
3. Require that financial lending institutions disclose: The costs of doing business, especially related to bank charges; Statistics related to loans granted analyzed by appropriate demographic data, related where possible to disadvantaged groups; and
4. Require, in its up-coming legislation, that financial institutions have consumer representation on their boards and that their business decisions related to human resources policies and lending practices be subject to analysis; and
5. Require that peer-lending enterprises be subject to a Federal "watch-dog" committee; and
6. Assist in the creation of a Financial Consumer Organization; and
7. Establish an independent office of the Bank Ombudsman to investigate complaints from bank customers, and that this ombudsman have the power to make binding rulings; and
8. Institute an evaluation system of financial institutions to encourage them to: Determine the credit needs of the communities their financial organizations serve; Determine how well their depositors are being served; Improve relationships vis-a-vis customer requirements