

Report and Recommendations of the Human Rights and Race Relations Representative,
Bernadette D'Souza to the CEIU Ontario Region Presidents' Conference, September 2025

Message from the HRRR Representative – Bernadette D'Souza

Dear colleagues and fellow unionists,

It is with a strong sense of responsibility and commitment that I present this report, outlining the activities, observations, and reflections from my term as your Human Rights and Race Relations Representative. This report is grounded in a commitment to transparency and accountability, principles that are not optional in a democratic union, but foundational to its integrity.

As a first-time member of the Ontario Regional Council, and a CEIU and PSAC member of over 30 years, I have approached this role with both humility and determination. Over the past year, I have engaged in this work with the full awareness that the voice I bring is shaped by experience at the local level and a history of community-based advocacy. This report reflects not only the work I've undertaken, but also the systemic and cultural barriers I have observed barriers which, in my view, continue to hinder our ability to build the equitable, member-driven union we aspire to be.

Let me be clear: the challenges we face today are not new. They are the cumulative result of years of insufficient transparency, inconsistent application of our own policies, and a top-down approach to governance that disconnects leadership from the rank-and-file. These issues require more than surface-level reforms they demand structural change and a cultural shift within CEIU.

That said, I also acknowledge my own position within this structure. As a union leader, I take accountability for the ways I may have contributed to these challenges, whether through oversight or inaction. This report is part of a broader effort to move from critique to constructive action to advocate for the kind of transformation that is urgently needed.

To my fellow members of the Ontario Regional Council:

We must commit to collective self-reflection and take active steps toward a more transparent, inclusive, and responsive leadership culture. Our legitimacy as representatives depends on our willingness to engage critically with our own processes and to respond meaningfully to the concerns of the membership.

To CEIU leadership at the regional and national levels:

Leadership entails more than representation—it requires accountability. It requires financial stewardship, procedural consistency, and an unwavering commitment to our Bylaws and Constitution. While I recognize that union leadership often entails difficult and thankless work,

we must never ask the membership to absorb the consequences of poor planning or avoidable missteps. The responsibility lies with us to do better.

To the membership:

You are the foundation of this union. The most important office is not held at ORC, nor in conference rooms, but among the members who speak out not for political gain, but out of conviction and care for the collective. Your voices matter. They must not only be heard they must shape the direction of this union.

I have witnessed extraordinary examples of principled leadership across all levels of our union individuals who act with courage and integrity, often under significant pressure. Their work must be supported, not just in rhetoric but in action. Hold your leaders accountable. Ask the difficult questions. But also stay engaged in the answers and the process of change.

A change in leadership alone cannot resolve deeply rooted issues. What is needed is a movement-wide recommitment to democratic principles, member education, and strict adherence to our union's governance structures. This means ensuring our members understand the Bylaws and Constitution, and that those in leadership follow them consistently, transparently, and without exception.

We must also remember: restorative justice is not incompatible with accountability. On the contrary, it is through just and transparent processes that we can repair trust and rebuild solidarity.

Let us move forward with clarity of purpose, guided by principle and united in action.

In solidarity,

Bernadette D'Souza

Human Rights and Race Relations Representative, Ontario Region

Executive Summary:

This report outlines the key activities and observations from my term as one of two Human Rights and Race Relations (HRRR) Representatives for Ontario. While some of this work was carried out collaboratively, other aspects were undertaken independently or in partnership with equity representatives from across the region. As such, this report is offered as a standalone submission to reflect the particular scope of my work and the distinct experiences I encountered while serving on the Ontario Regional Council (ORC).

As previously stated in the 2024 joint HRRR report, the role we hold spans an expansive and diverse region that includes nearly 42 locals. It is a role intended to provide responsive and inclusive support to members from equity-deserving groups particularly those whose identities intersect across multiple dimensions of equity. Our shared objective is to foster an environment where no member feels they must set aside any part of themselves in order to meaningfully participate in union life.

This year's report is comprehensive in nature, as much of my time was spent addressing systemic and procedural barriers that, despite consistent engagement and follow-up, often remained unresolved. In particular, I encountered challenges related to process transparency and adherence to bylaws and established resolutions. These issues are documented here not as criticisms, but as areas warranting further examination and discussion.

It is my hope that future reports from this role will be able to highlight more progress than obstacles. However, in the interest of full transparency, this report reflects not only the successes and outcomes achieved, but also the context in which they occurred including the structural limitations that shaped them. Wherever concerns are raised, they are supported by documentation and put forward with the intention of contributing to ongoing dialogue and improvement.

Mandate of the Human Rights and Race Relations (HRRR) Representative:

At the time of writing, several members of the Ontario Regional Council, including myself have noted that updates appear to have been made to the CEIU Ontario Region's Bylaws, Regulations, and Policies, including sections concerning the roles and responsibilities of ORC Representatives. To the best of our knowledge, these updates were not brought forward for formal discussion or ratification by the membership or at a Presidents' Conference.

This observation is included here simply to clarify the context in which this report was prepared. The mandate described within reflects the responsibilities in place at the time I began this role. Any inconsistencies between the work reported here and the current online documentation may be due to revisions made without prior consultation or notification.

Section 4: Priorities for 2024–2025:

The first year of my term, 2024, presented a number of unanticipated challenges. While at times disheartening, these experiences also reinforced the importance of clarity, collaboration, and proactive planning in fulfilling this role.

Early in the year, I became aware of a proposed ORC “manual” intended to outline internal processes such as conference planning, financial procedures, and general Council operations. Despite substantial efforts invested in its development, the document was not finalized or circulated for broader use.

Recognizing the importance of having clear guidelines, I developed and submitted my own plan of action for 2025, which was brought forward for review at the first ORC meeting of the year in January. This plan, found in full in the Appendices—identifies key priorities for the year and is structured around the S.M.A.R.T. goals framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), with a focus on tangible, member-centered outcomes.

Priority 1: Staffing – Advancing Transparency and Equity in Career Progression

With an extensive background in staffing within the federal public service, I bring a strong commitment to equity and fairness in employment practices. Many members especially those based outside the National Capital Region have raised concerns about being overlooked for career development opportunities or discouraged when advocating for advancement. These concerns have been shared consistently and deserve careful attention.

Evidence from reports such as that of Dr. Zellers, submitted in support of the Black Class Action lawsuit, further substantiates these experiences. The report highlights ongoing barriers faced by Black public servants in accessing merit-based advancement opportunities barriers that reflect broader patterns of systemic inequity.

Based on this context, I identified key areas where support was needed, and proposed strategies to address these challenges in collaboration with members and allies. These efforts are outlined in greater detail in the subsequent sections of this report.

Challenge	Strategy
Information provided by the employer is inaccurate, confusing and/or outdated	Research and share correct information and encourage members to share-it-forward
Members are fearful that challenging the employer while duly advocating for their career advancement cause reprisal	Teach advocacy strategies that are positive, demonstrate willingness to collaborate and show members there are alternative strategies available to advance a career without filing complaints and grievances that may not get adequate union support
Lack of transparency from the employer on	Sharing of resources, information, how to file

staffing processes, particularly non-advertised processes	ATIP requests and analyze posters on jobs.gc.ca
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Priority 2: Build trust between union leadership and membership:

After attending the 2024 Ontario Region Presidents' Conference, and hearing a number of concerns from the membership about claims not being approved on time, complaint processes being unduly abandoned or even ignored – and my personal experience with By-Laws and Resolutions of Record being ignored or deemed “outdated” at random – I felt it was necessary to work towards restoring trust and governance within our union.

I also feel that lack of participation in votes threatens the democracy of our union, and leaves most of the direction of the union in the hands a privileged few who, by nature of their election to existing positions, have access to additional votes on policy and business of the union.

In saying this, I recognize that I am one of these privileged few, and I devised these strategies and sought support to try to combat:

Challenge	Strategy
Unions are large and members may not feel engaged at the local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizing budget to attend more local meetings and facilitating the attendance of national union reps Publishing more personal communications products and inviting members to engage and comment
A sentiment of “what are you doing with my dues” among members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased budget transparency Increased education on understanding budgets and finances
Corrupt leadership in other organization or targeted attacks on unions from the ruling class, reflecting poorly on unions in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading by example Sharing information about how the ruling class works to subjugate workers and pit them against one another

I circulated the plan to the National Vice-Presidents (NVPs) and members of the Ontario Regional Council (ORC) in an effort to foster collaboration, particularly in light of prior feedback I had received, which suggested that I was not engaging sufficiently with colleagues. Sharing the plan was a genuine attempt to invite input and create a shared direction. However, with the exception of the other HRRR representative, who thoughtfully noted that while the ideas were valuable, the timing might be challenging due to the bargaining year and ongoing Workforce Adjustment (WFA) no further feedback was received.

The absence of engagement left me uncertain, especially as I had hoped the plan would be seen as a constructive foundation for collaboration. I remain convinced that open dialogue and coordinated action in this area are essential to advancing our equity commitments.

Retrospective for 2024-2025.

General accomplishments:

- Attended 6 RUMCCs where member concerns that could not be resolved at LUMCCs were debated and discussed
- In collaboration with the other HRRR Representative, planned and co-chaired the 2025 CEIU Ontario Region Human Rights/Race Relations Conference
- Attended several District Conferences as a guest on my own budget
- Held weekly “office hours” for any member wishing to connect with me on Tuesday evenings – still open on a first-come first serve basis to any member who writes to me
- Solicited locals for items to RUMCC (Regional Union Management Consultation Committee) meetings.
- Attended and fully participated in Ontario Regional Council meetings
- Engaged with members individually, took concerns up with the NVPs when brought to my attention and coached members for PMA discussions with the employer, staffing complaints and individual grievances
- Attended AGMs and GMs of locals when invited
- Funded a table of 6 CEIU members to Peel Labour Councils IWD Event

Published [several blog posts](#) tracking my work with the union, in an informal manner meant to update the membership.

January 2025

- I circulated a strategic plan for feedback among the Ontario Regional Council (ORC), with the hope of fostering collaboration and shared direction. Despite this outreach, I received little to no response.
- As an advisor to the four equity standing committees Racialized Action, Differently Abled, 2SLGBTQIA+, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)I made efforts to support all groups equitably. However, I was informed that my involvement appeared to favour one committee over the others. I respectfully offer the following context:
 - During Pride Month 2024, I sought to support members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community by proposing the use of my ORC budget to help fund participation in

local Pride events. This proposal was declined by regional leadership, who advised it did not align with current budgetary guidelines.

- For Pride Toronto 2024, related expenses submitted through my ORC budget line were denied, without any specific policy or guideline cited in the decision.
- In a personal capacity, I commissioned a local artist to create Progress Flag heart pins, using my own funds, as a gesture of visible solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.
- I supported the motion to include the Duty to Accommodate (DTA) as a recurring item on the ESDC Ontario Region RUMCC agenda, in keeping with principles of accessibility and inclusion.
- I regularly attended meetings of other standing committees and maintained active engagement with their members. Nonetheless, I continued to receive general feedback that I was “not collaborating,” though efforts to seek clarification or references to policy have not yielded concrete responses.

February 2025

- As part of my plan as HRRR Representative, I made it a priority to attend as many local Annual General Meetings (AGMs) as possible. While many were constructive, my experience at one IRCC local’s AGM raised several concerns:
 - Though I was invited as a guest, I was unexpectedly asked to run elections during the meeting. I was willing to assist, but was not informed in advance, which limited my ability to ensure proper digital infrastructure was in place.
 - Several members expressed that they had been discouraged from attending the AGM due to unresolved concerns over their standing. These members were actively working in the office and appeared to be legitimate members of the local, though they had encountered challenges with Phoenix-related dues processing.
 - The same members indicated they had been requesting fiscal transparency from their executive without success. Although motions were passed to pause spending until these concerns were addressed, they were reportedly not implemented.
 - Following the meeting, I was approached by regional leadership regarding my presence at the AGM. However, my role was strictly that of an invited guest. The environment I witnessed was, at times, hostile and concerning, particularly in how members were treated during the proceedings.

March 2025

Beyond Black History Month

- I continue to view allyship with the Black community as a key aspect of my role, and I strive to act in accordance with that responsibility.

- This year, rather than publishing a standard Black History Month statement, I aimed to promote year-round engagement by highlighting lesser-known but significant historical contributions such as the work of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, an all-Black union formed in response to exclusion from mainstream labour movements.

International Women's Day - Peel Labour Council

- Despite previous challenges in obtaining approval to use ORC budget lines for equity initiatives, such as Pride participation, I made a renewed effort in March by reaching out to the Peel Labour Council. I proposed sponsoring a table at their International Women's Day event to support CEIU women members from locals in the region, especially those who had not been invited through other CEIU Ontario Region channels.
 - Unfortunately, this initiative was interpreted by the Women's Representative as overstepping my mandate, and their concerns were escalated to National leadership.
 - My explanation that the event was intended to amplify the voices of women working at the grassroots level, particularly in Peel and the GTA was not acknowledged, and broader concerns about the lack of policy-based clarification in feedback remain unresolved.
 - In reflecting on the experience, I continue to ask: would it have been more appropriate to leave these seats empty? To not extend an invitation to members who were eager to attend and contribute? It is difficult to see how that would have served the interests of CEIU women in a meaningful way.

May 2025

Asian Heritage Month

- As a member of the Asian community, this observance holds personal significance for me. I participated in local community celebrations and took the opportunity to engage with members and allies through shared cultural events.

CEIU Ontario Front-End Outreach Training and Conference

- Having worked as a front-end employee since 2009 and served on the Front-End Committee since its inception, this conference is especially meaningful to me. However, attending this year's event raised some concerns related to process and transparency.
 - I observed that some attendees who were not front-end workers were granted full delegate status, including voice and vote. While I was pleased to attend using my ORC budget line, I found it curious that, despite my long-standing involvement in this area, I was not granted delegate status.

- I also noted a concentration of delegates from a limited number of locals. Given the broad reach of the Ontario Region and the hundreds of front-end workers represented by our union, this seemed to limit broader participation and visibility—especially among those the conference was intended to serve.
- Despite these concerns, the conference was a valuable learning opportunity, and I appreciated the chance to connect with members and listen to their experiences.

June 2025

Pride Month

- In recognition of Pride Month, I once again commissioned the creation of “Progress Flag Hearts” to celebrate the full spectrum of identities within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, with special attention to BIPOC and transgender members. To avoid administrative challenges experienced in previous years, I funded this initiative personally.

Indigenous Heritage Month:

- I initially planned to support Indigenous Heritage Month with respectful engagement and programming, guided by FNMI-identified members of Council. However, I received feedback from the FNMI Representative that a message I posted ahead of Red Dress Day was inappropriate, and as a result, I withdrew the message.
 - Reflecting on this, I continue to ask whether efforts to visibly support equity-seeking members—whether through simple acts such as posting a message or using allocated budget to promote engagement—should be met with critique when done in good faith and within the scope of the HRRR mandate. I have raised these concerns with the NVPs, but to date, have not received a response.

CEIU National Human Rights and Race Relations Conference:

- Although I was not selected as a delegate, I felt it was important to attend the National HRRR Conference and did so using my own ORC budget line.
- The conference provided a meaningful space for dialogue and national networking. However, a few incidents gave me pause regarding broader union practices:
 - A member who self-identified as Métis was told during the FNMI caucus that Métis people were not considered part of the Indigenous group—a statement that runs counter to both CEIU’s practices and historical recognition. I raised this concern with the Conference Chair, who informed me the issue stemmed from the individual’s self-ID status.

- At a subsequent ORC meeting, the NVPs referred to an “unauthorized caucus” allegedly held during the HRRR Conference, stating that “video evidence” existed. However, no such evidence was ever presented, and no further clarification has been provided. I remain concerned that this may have been an attempt to cast suspicion on informal conversations among members, which are a natural and healthy part of conference participation.

July 2025

Eastern District Conference

- This event was one of the most constructive and positive conferences I have participated in to date.
- Delegates engaged in thoughtful discussions on the state of the union, workplace issues, and member engagement.
- A standout example was the work of members addressing health and safety concerns at the Belleville SCC. These members brought forward detailed concerns at a RUMCC meeting and have continued to work closely with their ORC Representative toward resolution—a clear example of member-led advocacy at its best.

August 2025

Southwest District Conference

- Once again, this district conference offered a highly positive and collaborative environment.
- Members arrived well-prepared to debate resolutions and were actively supported by their ORC Representative.
- I was invited to speak briefly about my role, and my remarks were warmly received by attendees. It was encouraging to witness such high levels of member engagement and mutual respect throughout the event.

CEIU Ontario Human Rights and Race Relations (HRRR) Conference:

I considered presenting this section separately, given my deep involvement in planning the HRRR Conference and the numerous lessons that emerged through the process. However, I’ve chosen to include it in the timeline, as it represents a substantial portion of my efforts during this year.

- Planning began in May 2024, in partnership with the other HRRR Representative. We were both new to the ORC at the time and aware that the scale of the conference would require long-term coordination and planning.
- Over nearly a year from May 2024 to March 2025 we worked to secure speakers, finalize the venue, prepare delegate lists, accommodate guests and observers, establish

rules of order, and shape the agenda. Throughout this time, we made repeated requests to the NVPs for guidance and approval. In many cases, timelines were delayed or remained unanswered.

- As someone with many years of experience chairing AGMs and sitting on various standing committees, I had full confidence that the event could be successful with proper planning. However, several unexpected challenges arose:
 - Extended delays in email responses, often with no follow-up.
 - Direction to implement measures that appeared to contradict CEIU’s By-Laws and Constitution, such as granting automatic delegate status to all equity committee members.
 - Tensions emerged when I asked for clarification or adherence to existing policies. At one point, I was informed that if these requests were not followed, there was a risk the conference would not move forward.
 - Despite never stating that equity committee members were “not allowed” to attend, I was advised that I was creating barriers, even though I simply advocated for a consistent application process, in line with union practices.
 - Attempts to raise these concerns—both with the NVPs and in writing to the National President—received no response.
- Ultimately, I was asked to approve resolutions arising from the conference. I respectfully declined, not out of opposition to the content, but because I could not support resolutions that, in my view, did not follow due process.
- My position remains: even when the spirit of a resolution is commendable, adherence to the processes that govern our union is essential. Without this, we risk eroding the very democratic foundations we strive to protect.

September 2025 – CEIU Ontario Presidents’ Conference

Planning for the Presidents’ Conference raised some procedural questions. Notably, the Resolutions Committee was not struck until quite late, and as a result, the circulated resolutions lacked a formal committee report. Some resolutions appeared to contradict CEIU’s By-Laws or proposed changes outside the scope of the Ontario Region’s authority.

As always, I remain committed to full transparency. Should you have questions about how my allocated funds were spent, I welcome those conversations. That kind of openness should be a basic expectation of all union leadership.

Recommendations to CEIU Ontario Region:

For Democracy and Transparency

- Ensure the CEIU Ontario website includes up-to-date and publicly accessible:

- Policies
 - Resolutions of Record
 - By-Laws (recently amended in August 2025—pending proper ratification)
 - Committee Reports (currently all listed as “coming soon”)
 - Meeting Minutes (currently displaying a broken link or error)
- Enforce Section 4 of the Ontario Region By-Laws:
No member of Ontario Council shall hold any other elected position at the regional level, nor serve as an alternate on any regional standing committee.

As HRRR Representative, I am committed to supporting equity committees in meeting these requirements, and I hope for a shared commitment from regional leadership to address this collaboratively.

For Fiscal Responsibility

- Process member claims consistently and promptly—members continue to report delays and lack of communication.
- Minimize discretionary interference in financial matters; claims should be evaluated per the By-Laws, not at the discretion of individuals, except where policy permits.
- Provide responses to long-standing questions, including:
 - Missing receipts for recorded expenses
 - Budget lines that have significantly increased without documentation
 - Allegedly missing financial records
- Consider more cost-effective approaches for training events, including the 2024 CEIU Ontario Region Bootcamp.
- Re-implement the 1986 Resolution of Record:
Ontario National Vice Presidents shall issue a financial report showing expenditures by line-item every three (3) months.
- Conduct a thorough review of all regional financial processes, with accountability and follow-up where irregularities are identified.

For Consistency in Policy Application:

As referenced earlier in this report, the issue of automatic delegate status to equity committee members sparked serious concern regarding the application of union policy.

I respectfully recommend:

- A comprehensive review of the Ontario Region’s By-Laws, Constitution, Resolutions, and other governing documents.

- The formation of an independent ad hoc committee, supported by National Union Representatives and independent of ORC members, to audit and clarify instances where procedures or policies may have been inconsistently applied.

In August 2025, I was directed to grant automatic delegate status to members of standing equity committees, contrary to the standing policies I could locate. I provided citations that included:

- Delegate status must be established by policy or constitution this applies even at the national level.
- A resolution of record states:
Each Committee is entitled to only one (1) representative, who may attend the Annual Representatives' Conference or any other Conference/Convention related to that Committee's mandate.

I compiled this information and submitted it to the NVPs and National President. I was informed that the resolution was "outdated," but I have yet to receive official confirmation of its repeal or replacement. As far as I can determine, it remains valid.

I strongly considered stepping down at that point. However, I chose to stay, in part so I could provide an honest and accurate account of these events in this report.

It is deeply disappointing that long-standing democratic processes may not have been upheld. Those who created and ratified these policies entrusted future leadership with their preservation. That responsibility should never be taken lightly.

My recommendation is straightforward: that CEIU Ontario Region, and all levels of leadership, abide fully by democratically established union policy—no exceptions.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

I acknowledge that this report may be seen by some as overly critical. However, I assure you these concerns were not raised here for the first time. I have tried to address them via email, in ORC discussions, and through one-on-one engagement with leadership.

Unfortunately, those avenues yielded little resolution. In some cases, I have felt dismissed or isolated for raising these issues. This report, then, is not a grievance it is a final appeal to engage members and future leaders in an honest dialogue about the realities of union service.

To those considering running for ORC or standing committee roles: it is rewarding work, but it is also challenging and often political. Knowing what lies ahead prepares you to lead with integrity and resilience.

Looking forward, I believe we can strengthen our union through:

- Building alliances with other unions and community organizations to promote inclusive labour practices.
- Increased member engagement through one-on-one conversations and workplace visibility.
- Continued direct support for members' concerns, particularly in underrepresented departments like IRCC and IRB.

Though members from these departments have faced difficult circumstances—such as layoffs and WFA—I've made myself available wherever possible, because their concerns reflect systemic issues across our workplaces.

Finally, I have offered Virtual Office Hours every Tuesday night for members to reach out with any concern. While uptake has been limited, the invitation remains open.

✉ You can reach me at: dsouzab@ceiu-seic.ca

Together, I believe we can build a stronger, more inclusive, and accountable union—rooted in the values we were elected to uphold.

In solidarity,

Bernadette D'Souza

Human Rights and Race Relations Representative, Ontario Region