

Canada disability benefit bill passes Parliament



Rachel Aiello
Senior Digital Parliamentary Reporter, CTV

The federal government's bill to implement a new Canada Disability Benefit passed Parliament on Tuesday.

Bill C-22, from Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion Carla Qualtrough, proposes to create a federal income supplement for low-income, [working-age people with disabilities](#), modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

There has been pressure on the federal Liberals to make good on this commitment for years, after a previous version of the bill died in the House with the call of the last federal election.

Qualtrough has billed this proposal as "an important part of Canada's social safety net" and a "game changer" that would benefit hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities. However, it remains unspecified how much money would be offered.

"This is an historic day! With this final vote in the Senate, Bill C-22 - the Canada Disability Benefit Act - is now on it's way to receiving Royal Assent," [Qualtrough tweeted Tuesday evening](#). "This is the culmination of years of activism from members of the disability community. This is your victory."

It was the first bill debated [at the start of the fall sitting](#), and passed the House in February. In the months since, the Senate has had its hands in the bill, ultimately making a handful of amendments.

Because the Senate had amended the bill, it bounced the legislation back into the House of Commons for re-consideration. Last week, the House voted to approve with some slight adjustments, five of the six Senate changes to Bill C-22, including acknowledgements of the rising cost of living and intersectional and systemic barriers facing the disability community, as well as stronger timelines for implementation.

However, senators Marilou McPhedran and Kim Pate voiced concern that the federal government rejected a "key" proposed change to the legislation that they said would have protected the disability benefit from potential private insurance claw backs, due to "concerns over provincial jurisdiction over the regulation of the insurance industry."

"Time will tell how this private insurance loophole may be exploited. If—and when—it is, Parliament will have a second chance to correct it. But, it will come at the expense of the disabled community, who will be made to suffer because the government failed to act courageously at the outset," said the senators in a joint statement.

On Tuesday, senators passed a motion from the government's representative Sen. Marc Gold, to concur with the House, paving the way for this bill to receive royal assent likely in the next few days.

Sen. Brent Cotter said before the vote that much as he would like to include protections against future claw backs, doing so would likely be unconstitutional.

"Whether we like it or not, and I don't, the no claw backs clause has within it the seeds of an almighty constitutional fight, which Ottawa would assuredly lose," he said.

"I'm not happy with that outcome," he also said. "I am as concerned about the stories that you have heard, that I have heard, as anybody, but there are limits to what we can do. Indeed, we have an obligation to respect those limits, whether we like it or not."

The passage of Bill C-22 is being celebrated by the disability advocacy community, as a "historic milestone," while noting work remains to develop the regulations that will determine the benefit's parameters.

Last week, 10 national disability organizations called on senators to pass Bill C-22 "immediately," noting the limited time left in Parliament before the summer break, and the fact that people with disabilities make up 40 per cent of Canada's low-income population.

"The transformative law begins to close a gaping hole in Canada's social safety net, offering persons with disabilities greater financial security, more choice, freedom, and dignity to live inclusive lives in the community," said Inclusion Canada in a statement on Tuesday.

With files from CTVNews.ca's Spencer Van Dyk

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