



Andria Babbington is the first woman of colour to lead Toronto & York Region Labour Council. (TYRLC).

After Andria Babbington arrived from Jamaica and was working as a room attendant at the Sheraton Centre Hotel, she had no idea what her co-workers were talking about when they suggested she assume the role of shop steward.

Still in her teens and the youngest on staff, she witnessed first-hand some of the challenges hotel housekeepers are exposed to. But complains to management fell on deaf ears.

“They would say it’s not my business and I should look the other way,” recalled Babbington. “Most of the workers were immigrants and newcomers and we weren’t treated with respect by management and guests. They didn’t have a voice and were afraid to speak out, fearing they might lose their jobs. I decided I wasn’t going to leave and, perhaps, the only way things were going to get better was if I stepped up.”

With support of co-workers and representatives of UNITE HERE Local 75 that has represented hospitality workers in Toronto and south-central Ontario since the 1890s, she took up the offer to become the shop steward, a position she held for 16 years until leaving the hotel in 2002 to work as a union organizer.

Last year, Babbington made history as the first woman of colour to lead the Toronto & York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) that represents almost 220,000 unionized workers in Canada’s largest urban centre. She replaced John Cartwright who held the position for almost two decades. Andria was the TYRLC Vice-President for the last nine years. [\(Article by RON FANFAIR\)](#)