

From: Beth Baskin [beth@kapn.net]
Sent: March 2, 2012 10:48 AM
To: socialassistancereview@ontario.ca
Subject: discussion paper #2

Hello

First and foremost I want to say thank you for the hours of travel and listening that the commission has put into this project.

Secondly, I want to express my profound disappointment. I was really looking forward to a document that would move us towards a radically different Social Assistance System in Ontario. This discussion paper is not that document and I fear that the report in June will also fall far short of the mark that is required to eliminate poverty in this province.

Thousands of people including children and seniors are condemned to a life below the poverty living on Ontario Works and The Ontario Disability Support Program. These rates need to be increased! As we review the submissions it is clear that four out of five submissions advocated increases and 16 municipalities across the province have passed motions supporting The Healthy Diet supplement. If you really heard this message why have you not reflected it more urgently and clearly in your discussion paper?

Why do you continue to pit the interests of social assistance recipients against those of the working poor in their discussion on an "appropriate benefit structure"? The Discussion Paper perpetuates the historical divisiveness of pitting the interests of the "deserving" poor (low wage workers) against the "undeserving" poor (social assistance recipients). Focusing on the need to balance the "benefit structure" so that OW/ODSP recipients do not receive more in income and services than low wage earners consigns both groups to ongoing poverty – the OW/ODSP recipients struggling to get out of deep poverty (below 80% of LIM) and the full-time, full-year minimum wage earner still falling below the poverty line. You must recognize that, in terms of income adequacy, the interests of these two groups are joined. Social assistance rates must be raised starting now so that over several years no one is living in deep poverty. Simultaneously, additional minimum wage increases must be scheduled over the next two years so that by 2014 a full-time, full-year worker earns an annual income 10% above the poverty line (\$12.50/hr).

Your report perpetuates the myth that people receiving assistance only require "the right incentives" to get back to work. The reasons that people receive assistance are multi-layered and often the result of circumstances beyond individual control. Your report once again blames the victims of a poor job market rather than challenge the Government to create the conditions for the development and growth of decent, life sustaining jobs, which would benefit not only social assistance recipients but workers now struggling on poverty level wages. What incentives does the Government need to

meet the reasonable expectation that the economy and labour market should offer the opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians?

In addition to not addressing the urgent needs for reform the commission re-opened the question of which income poverty measure should be used in social assistance reform. The Government clearly set the Low Income Measure (50% of median income) as Ontario's official income poverty line in 2008, and LIM is internationally recognized and used by the United Nations. This issue is resolved and should not be used to further confuse, delay or distract from urgently needed action.

I had hoped and expected that you as commissioners would clearly champion the need for radical reform in the social justice system and offer some solid options. There are no shortage of suggestions and research to lead us in an improved direction. I wish you had heard them and incorporated them into this discussion.

I hope that the discussion coming out of this paper substantially influences your understandings and recommendations for the final report. We desperately need to work for a common good that benefits all Ontarians. Reforming the social assistance system is one piece of the puzzle. As a person of faith I continue to work locally and at other levels to improve life for my brothers and sisters and hope I can count on you to join me in making a difference.

Thank you

Beth Baskin
435 Shuter Street, Toronto ON M5A 1X4