



February 22, 2012

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario  
2 Bloor Street West  
4th Floor, Suite 400  
TORONTO ON M4W 3E2

Commissioners F. Lankin and M.A. Sheikh:

We are responding to the request for more input regarding the recently released reports of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.

We are the Family Issues Integration Team, a subcommittee of the Hastings and Prince Edward Children's Services Network. The Network is a partnership of not-for-profit agencies and organizations that serve children, youth, and their families.

In the document What We Heard, you acknowledge that "many people told the Commission that social assistance rates are too low, under both Ontario Works and ODSP." In both documents you provide illustrations of this reality (i.e. a family of 4 in Ottawa having \$25 month after paying for basic shelter and food, and a single person having a shortfall of \$334 per month after paying for rent and food).<sup>1</sup>

In an analysis of the submissions to your commission,<sup>2</sup> Poverty Free Ontario has indicated that four out of five submissions to the commission recommend income adequacy as a priority. In spite of such clearly expressed community input, your Approaches<sup>3</sup> paper provides no specific recommendations to address this. Why is the Commission failing to heed the message so clearly expressed in the vast majority of submissions to the Commission?

You have also heard the resolutions from sixteen councils, representing 3,000,000 Ontarians, to support a \$100 per month Healthy Food Supplement.<sup>2</sup> This is an immediate action that could be taken to provide some measure of immediate remediation. Again, your Approaches paper fails to outline any specific measure that could be taken.

Further, we were dismayed to read your debate about which income poverty measure should be used in social assistance reform. The Ontario Government identified an official line in 2008 (Low Income Measure - 50% of median income),<sup>2</sup> and we urge the government to use its time and resources to focus on the real issues rather than reopening a debate that has been previously studied and resolved.

People on Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) have been living under austerity since the 22% cuts in 1995. People on OW and ODSP are living in poverty. You state that you are making your report in the context of “the government’s commitment to reducing poverty in our province.” We agree with Poverty Free Ontario’s statement that, “the paper lacks any clear, compelling overall direction to end poverty for social assistance recipients...and on issues such as establishing a poverty measure for adequacy in benefit levels, the Paper actually moves the process backwards.” We urge you, the Commissioners and the government, to recognize this commitment and redress income inadequacy by taking immediate action to implement the Healthy Food Supplement, and to adjust benefit rates accordingly so that recipients are able to live above the Poverty Line.

Sincerely,

Paul Meadows  
Chair  
Family Issues Integration Team

Terry Swift  
Co-Chair  
HPE Children & Youth Services Network

#### Endnotes:

1. What We Heard: A summary of Discussions on social assistance, Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. February 2012. P.17.
2. Call for Cross-Community Action on Social Assistance Review. Discussion Paper #2. February 13, 2012. Social Planning Network of Ontario.
3. Approaches for Reform, Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. February 2012.