

Voices for a Just Society
People of Faith Working for Change

October 30, 2013

Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Province of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Re: Social Assistance Review Final Report, October 2012 and
Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, February 2012

Dear Premier Wynne:

Voices for a Just Society is a group of churches from different denominations in the north Toronto area that formed in 2010 to study social policy and bring together our voices against injustice.

We are writing to you today to express our concern about the lack of progress that has been made by your government in implementing recommendations of the above noted reports in 2012, and with respect to the Poverty Reduction Strategy your Party first announced in 2008. Social justice is an integral part of our faith, as central as prayer and worship. As Christians we have long deplored the intolerable living conditions of recipients of social assistance in Ontario.

Last February we wrote to you about how pleased we were to see in the SAR report a number of positive recommendations to address these conditions and urged your government to immediately implement recommendations 32, 33 and 61 of the report noted here as a first step to comprehensive social assistance reform in Ontario.

Recommendation 32. We recommend that, initially, the Province set the standard rate at \$100 per month over the rate, at the time of implementation, for a single adult renter receiving Ontario Works. The standard rate should be adjusted in the future, with changes to the minimum wage and tax credits, to move recipients closer to the BMA level.

Recommendation 33. We recommend that the Province allow all people receiving social assistance to earn an additional \$200 per month in employment earnings without affecting their benefits.

Recommendation 61. We recommend that the Province take immediate steps to harmonize the liquid asset rules, so that a maximum of \$5,000 for a single individual and \$7,500 for a couple will apply equally to all social assistance recipients.

To date, these changes have not been made, and receipt of a general response from Minister McMeekin did not indicate what your governments' specific plans and commitments are or will be with respect to the SAR report.

With respect to the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services report presented to the government in early 2012, our group has studied Mr. Drummond's Chapter 8 Social Program recommendations and unanimously supports all 19 of them with the proviso that minimum cost of living increases tied to the CPI be made to recipients of social assistance program payments while the suggested much needed structural changes are being implemented.

As noted in Recommendation 8-1 we recognize that some positive steps have been taken towards simplifying access to Ontario's income-tested benefit programs, however there remain many important structural changes that need to be made if current levels of service are to be sustained and our most vulnerable fellow citizens are to directly receive funding assistance increases. We therefore request that any response to this letter include what specific plans and commitments your government is or will be making about the 19 recommendations.

We look forward to realizing a positive outcome for the recommendations of these reports.

Yours sincerely,

Scott McDougall, Voices for a Just Society
Chair, FaithWorks and Outreach Committee, St. John's Anglican Church
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*The Vision of **Voices for a Just Society**, approved December 2010*

A growing community of faith-based groups in north Toronto working together for a just society by strengthening and supporting relationships within our community; learning and sharing to increase our knowledge of issues; speaking with one voices; and acting together to address injustice.

c.c. Hon. Ted McMeekin
Minister of Community and Social Services

Hon. Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance

Mr. Mike Colle, MPP, Eglinton-Lawrence

Hon Eric Hoskins, MPP, St. Paul's

Mr. Tim Hudak
Leader of the Opposition and Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario

Ms. Andrea Horwath
Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario

The following members of *Voices for a Just Society* approve this letter.

Name:

Church:

OR

Name:

Position:

Church: