

Kitchener, January 20st, 2015

The Honorable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance

Submitted during the pre-budget consultation in Cambridge January 20, 2015

Pre-Budget Consultation Submission to the Ministry of Finance

***Poverty Free Kitchener Waterloo Action Group** is built through participation of social service agencies, groups, and individuals. The Group has been mobilizing local voices in consultations on the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Social Assistance Review since 2011.*

We applaud the change of language used in the second Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy that acknowledges the potential of all citizens to prosper. However, neither the 2nd Poverty Reduction Strategy nor the Fall Economic Update Backgrounder, Supporting A Fair Society, go far enough to articulate the holistic vision and approach needed to eliminate poverty and guide successful social assistance reform in Ontario.

The Ontario Government has begun to make changes to social assistance and has promised funding for fighting homelessness and supporting local poverty reduction strategies. However, employment is still touted as the main solution to poverty and we know this is not the case for everyone. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and the piecemeal fashion in which system changes have been made, raise concern:

- The way program changes are being done make it more difficult for people to navigate the system
- There is no process for people to give input and feedback on the changes that are taking place
- Decisions are still removed from those who are most affected by changes

- Greater strain is being put on local municipalities, community organizations, churches and volunteers to provide the right information for people seeking assistance as well as to fill gaps in supports and services that may be created by system changes

The 2015 Ontario budget must include sufficient funds to:

- Fund social assistance at adequate levels to keep people out of deep poverty
- Sustain additional supports for the most vulnerable, especially work related benefits for those with disabilities and supported housing for those who are, or at risk of being, homeless
- Support a wider range of community services to assist with system transition, navigation and to fill gaps identified by the community
- Support communities and service recipients to give input into the planning and evaluation of social service and community support programs and systems
- Provide programs that support people to contribute to society regardless of their potential for employment

The face of poverty has not changed. It takes a lot of effort just going through daily activities if you are poor, such as getting to the next meal or getting to appointments. We do not need small changes that have no sizable impact in eliminating poverty. We need bold action, as the Government of Ontario has promised, in collaboration with people with lived experience and their local supports.