

2017 ONTARIO BUDGET RESPONSE

Ontario balances its budget with positive policy changes

Low income families hoping for continued improvements

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

TORONTO – Budget 2017, 'A Stronger, Healthier Ontario', balances the books and proposes important changes for the province. While the budget makes positive policy changes and investments, Ontario Campaign 2000 calls on the government to continue to bring more relief to the 326,550 families in low income. Families in low income require more significant investments in social assistance rates, social housing and workplace reform to leave poverty behind.

Ontario Campaign 2000 welcomes the creation of OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare which allows children and youth 24 and under to get access prescription drugs for free. "This is an important step forward in the creation of a more comprehensive healthcare system. It lifts a significant burden off low income families to provide the prescriptions their children need. We look forward to more essential services being included within OHIP, including vision care, mental health services and assistive devices," says Jessica Mustachi, Ontario Campaign 2000 Coordinator.

The budget also includes changes announced earlier to the rental market, including expanding the rental control guidelines to units built in 1991 or after and changes to the Residential Tenancy Act. These changes will ensure children and families are not pushed out of their homes due to excessive rent increases and provide more protection against unlawful eviction. We are looking forward to continued investments for the creation of new social housing and social housing capital repairs. Housing affordability is a critical issue for low income families and supporting the creation and repair of social housing units across the province would greatly decrease the numbers of families in Core Housing Need.

The budget includes important investments in child care with the creation of 24,000 more licensed child care spaces, part of the province's 2016 commitment to create 100,000 new quality, affordable and licensed child care spaces in five years. These increases in spaces are greatly needed, and we are waiting for the province to take the next step forward in creating a universal, accessible, affordable and high quality child care system. "We're hopeful that today's budget will be just the start of action on child care this year." said Carolyn Ferns of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care "But the new child care framework cannot come soon enough. Child care cannot wait."

Central changes were also made regarding income security. As earlier announced, the budget confirms the 3-year Basic Income Pilot which will take place in Hamilton, Thunder Bay and Lindsay and a separate pilot being co-created and designed for and by First Nations. Social assistance changes included a 2% increase in rates for people on Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), increases to asset limits and gift exemptions for people on OW and ODSP and increases to the Remote Communities Allowance. The province will also continue to increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) with inflation. These changes are small steps forward, but more substantive changes are necessary to address the depth of poverty experienced by individuals and families across

the province. The province must ensure that low income parents are able to live with dignity and are not faced with having to choose between paying for food, utilities or rent.

Inflationary changes to the minimum wage are being continued and the budget discusses the forthcoming report from the Changing Workplaces Review. To ensure that work leads people out of poverty it is important for the province to support good jobs, with liveable wages, benefits, sick days and the opportunity for workers to join unions.

The budget supports many opportunities for youth. Notably, the implementation of the changes to OSAP grants to provide students with annual family incomes of \$50,000 or less with funding to cover average tuition costs is confirmed. There will be additional grants for people with family incomes less than \$90,000. Changes were also made to OSAP loan repayments, whereby graduates will not have to repay the provincial portion of their OSAP loans until their annual income is \$35,000. The budget also reiterates previously announced changes to the Child and Family Services Act, increasing the age of protection from 16 to 18 at a crucial stage in the lives of young people in care. Further extending the age limit beyond 18 would only set youth up for further success.

Important additional support is provided for Indigenous children through increased funding toward child and family programs on reserve, healthcare funding, investing \$200 million over three years to support Indigenous youth to have access to post-secondary education and training opportunities, and investing \$4 million over two years to support Indigenous anti-racism programs. The previously announced funding allocation for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan was also included, however no funds were allocated for the overall strategy for the Anti-Racism Directorate. The budget also discussed the Gender Wage Gap Review and the importance of supporting work opportunities for people living with disabilities. Directing funding and creating policy changes in these areas would provide an essential step forward to address the higher rates of poverty experienced by these groups across the province.

In balancing the budget the government created an excellent opportunity to support robust services and improvements to lift children and families out of poverty. In this time of wealth, we look forward to the province taking a bold stand to create a caring Ontario by addressing income inequality, creating a universal child care program, adequately funding social housing, substantially raising social assistance rates, increasing the minimum wage and providing funding to significantly address the high poverty rates experienced by marginalized groups.

Ontario Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, network of over 70 organizations working collaboratively to end child and family poverty. It is a partner coalition of Campaign 2000, a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty nationally.

. - 30 -

Contact:

Jessica Mustachi, Ontario Coordinator, Campaign 2000

416-595-9230 x241

JessicaMu@familyservicetoronto.org