

For immediate release

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There is no compassion in imposing cuts and confusion on children and families receiving Social Assistance

Ontario Campaign 2000 is deeply troubled by the Ontario government's announcements regarding the social assistance system. Citing 'compassionate grounds', government will roll back a planned 3% increase to social assistance rates to only 1.5%. Despite committing during the election campaign to continue the Basic Income Pilot, the pilot was cancelled. Important regulatory changes slated to take effect in the fall and meant to improve the lives of recipients of social assistance have also been lost. Government now plans to undertake a review of both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (OW and ODSP) in the next one hundred days. No detail was provided about how recipients and others familiar with the system will be involved in order to improve recipients' lives and ensure dignity.

Ontario Campaign 2000 and our partners issued questionnaires to all parties seeking details of their policy directions and anti-poverty platforms prior to the June 7th election. The Ontario PC Party was the only party that did not provide a response. Without a clear sense of the government's approach to poverty reduction, the nature of the upcoming social assistance review and how the decision to cancel the Basic Income pilot was made, low income children and their families have been plunged into a state of confusion and anxiety about what their lives will be like after the next 100 days.

"Children in families receiving social assistance are already living on the lowest incomes in the province," says Anita Khanna, Campaign 2000 National Coordinator. "Children in these families already face heart-breaking instability, wondering, 'will my next meal fill me up?' and, 'what school will I move to if we get to leave the shelter?' By cutting the rate increase in half and cancelling the basic income pilot, the government has taken money out of vulnerable families' pockets and put their children at further risk."

For decades, advocates have called for positive reform to social assistance to support recipients' dignity and well-being. Many of the changes slated to take effect in the fall would have improved children's and families' lives, including:

- Increasing the amount of money that people on Ontario Works and ODSP can keep when they work a paid job
- A change to the definition of "spouse" – from 3 months co-habitation to 3 years
- Giving full basic benefits (instead of a lower rate) to people who get housing and food from the same provider, including many people with disabilities
- Giving support to more people in the North where daily living costs are much higher.

Yesterday's announcements deepen the instability, uncertainty and poverty suffered by low income families in Ontario. The latest data indicate that over 475,000 children live in poverty in Canada's wealthiest province. Recent data also show that 40% of children in families living in poverty have a parent who works full time, full year. Responses to poverty must move beyond only prescribing work so that affordable childcare, housing, transit and health supports are in place to provide families with the strong foundation they require to move out of poverty.

Addressing poverty and inequality is beneficial to all Ontarians, ensuring a healthier population, greater economic prosperity and equality. Allowing child and family poverty to continue, or to worsen, costs Ontario significantly. For children, even brief periods of time spent in poverty contribute to the development of life-long chronic health conditions such as asthma and diabetes. Child poverty also impairs achievement at school and can hamper the ability to work or participate in one's community in adulthood.

"All Ontario children deserve stability and support," adds Khanna. "We urge government to look to social assistance recipients, multiple reports and decades of research as their road map to improve the system and provide families with dignity and hope for a better future."

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