

Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
Frost Building South
7th Floor, 7 Queen's Park Cres.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

January 13, 2020

Dear Honourable Minister Phillips,

St. Stephen's Community House is a multi-service Toronto-based agency working to alleviate poverty and build resilient communities. We provide services for over 25,000 residents every year. To learn more about our programs and services, we invite you to visit our website at www.sscto.ca.

Over the past year, we have consulted with our program participants of different ages and backgrounds on their recommendations for an Ontario where everyone can succeed. We are pleased to share this input for the 2020 Pre-Budget Consultations. Hundreds of people have participated in discussions on key municipal, provincial and federal issues that matter to them.

1. The top issue by far is the need for more affordable housing, accessible to those living in deep poverty or on a fixed income. Our participants asked for more housing to be built – public housing and co-operative housing.
2. The second most mentioned issues are good jobs and a higher minimum wage.
3. Our senior citizens repeatedly mentioned the need for improved healthcare.

A 24 year old participant spoke about the low minimum wage as well as the need for free post-secondary tuition for those living with a low income:

"Minimum wage is not a living wage for a lot of reasons ... I have friends who are locked into tens of thousands of dollars of student debt. There is a lack of good jobs for young people and I worry about affordability of education for the future. Corporations need to pay their fair share of taxes."

Childcare is a vital support for many of our participants. Provincial funding for childcare subsidies and more affordable childcare in general was raised by many parents:

"We are shocked and frustrated with the price (of childcare in Toronto). We applied for the fees subsidized program. We didn't qualify ... we had to live in a very small one bedroom to afford daycare. We decided to sell the car, and not go on vacations to see our family. We are living by the paycheque every month. We had to use a credit card to pay. We do believe the price for daycare is so high in Toronto. Even if we want to have another child we can't."

Funding for public transit remains a pressing issue for participants in all age groups. Low income participants find that being able to access a transit pass is key to success in life. This man is asking for reduced prices for transit passes:

"The Metropass allowed me to volunteer at many places, including the Church of the Redeemer, where I cooked two days a week for people in greater need than myself. We need to reduce the cost of the Metropass so other people do not have to choose between eating properly or going to a doctor's appointment, job interview or helping others. When you provide the means to help someone stand on their own two feet and move ahead, they in turn can be in the position to be strong enough to help others. I am proof that this is possible."

In response to the overdose crisis, St. Stephen's Community House opened an overdose prevention site. Unfortunately our site was not renewed for provincial funding, and the need remains in our neighbourhood. Further, many more consumption and treatment centres are needed urgently across the province. This woman visited our overdose prevention site and shared her experience:

"My visit to the overdose prevention site helped get me into treatment and recovery. I was a hardcore crystal meth user for 10 years. I didn't realize how much stigma was really keeping me down. A place to go where you can be in a community and be accepted for where you're at can help people into treatment without forcing them. I think everyone deserves another chance at improving their lives."

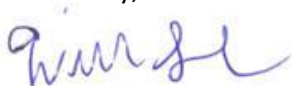
This year, our volunteers surveyed 87 people using homeless drop-in centres and found panic and fear about changes to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). They said that people will end up homeless and will die on the streets if they lose ODSP.

"This is death by a thousand cuts. People will start living more on the streets. We will see more tents this year versus last year. ... Without ODSP many people will end up hospital and become more homeless."

St. Stephen's Community House shares the concerns raised by our participants and neighbours, and encourages the Ontario Government to take action in the 2020 Ontario Budget to address them. **We call on this government to invest in affordable housing, post-secondary education, a higher minimum wage, affordable child care, income supports, and better health care for a healthier and more prosperous Ontario.**

Thank you for reviewing our submission. We are happy to arrange for you to meet in person with our participants to hear directly about their ideas for a stronger Ontario. You can reach us at 416 925 2103 ext. 1241 or sbill@sschto.ca.

Sincerely,



Bill Sinclair
Executive Director
St. Stephen's Community House