

January 20, 2020

Attn: Julia Douglas, Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley Street West, Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A2
Via Email: comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

Dear Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,

Thank you for accepting this written presentation for Pre-Budget Consultations.

I am again requesting an Ombudsman to protect the developmentally disadvantaged residing in agency care, as well as long overdue direct-to-the-client supports.

Personal support staff hours have been cut again, while our tax dollars seemingly pay for a top-heavy corporate structure of unnecessary job titles. In our case, my Downs Syndrome brother is being neglected as the needs of his roommate increase. In response to my request for appropriate care or options, the agency has again noted the lack of financial aid from the Ministry. Specifically there is an erroneous lack of anticipation for aging and other changing needs of the vulnerable. Unfortunately, agency efforts seem to be distracted with self-promotion and propaganda. Additionally, it is unfair to pit families against one another to "compete" for what's available. We are all trying our best to provide for those unable to care for themselves.

Agencies must be discerning and held accountable with both funding priorities, and personnel choices. Unnecessary management positions, unproductive supervisors, and those lacking credibility need to be eliminated, with re-directed funding to dependable front-line supports. Potentially effected employees have the opportunity to find positions elsewhere, but the vulnerable are not given any alternatives. The purpose and focus of agency care must be reinforced, by placing the needs of the client first.

As a recent example, I had to take my brother into my home to provide care due to some unforeseen medical issues (days / weeks at a time over the past couple of months). Though it is my pleasure, I had no choice, and it's not always convenient to adjust unexpectedly. Otherwise, my brother would have been left sick and alone without appropriate care, and worse, with an unpredictably mean roommate. I was told years ago, following a previous budget cut there was no other option as there is no staff. In this respect, my contributions are now taken for granted, and I am relied upon to be this agency's unpaid volunteer. These expectations are now increasing as I'm asked to do more for my brother in his home, which I'm not always able to do. Yet his story will be promoted as one of successful independent living.

I was told the Ministry (of Community and Social Services) would hold the agencies accountable, however this is not entirely true. Their unchanged role is to monitor overall budget adherence and quality assurance. The Ministry will not intervene to better streamline funding and prioritize the vulnerable, which is now imperative. The Ministry will also not intervene as long as compliance standards are met, and ironically, any inspection or investigation will be deemed successful. While this might mean sanitary living conditions, in our case the lack of suitable support speaks to a lack of quality assurance. I am again concerned for my brother's health and well-being given the situation in his home. Also, it is discouraging for good workers to receive unfair treatment due to irresponsible leadership. It creates low morale, and we don't want to lose any more quality employees. Agency clerical admin positions have been eliminated with direct support staff expected to absorb these extra responsibilities, which further detracts from client care. It seems the lower rated functional jobs have been cut so higher-ranking positions can be retained. This is not helpful. Additionally, I have encouraged my brother to be expressive, as repressing issues has caused him health issues, however in so doing we have met resistance from the agency which suggests it would be easier for some if he (and I) would remain silent. It's unfortunate that when the vulnerable are asked to remain silent, it is often impossible to gain or regain any sense of self-esteem. Also, when managers encourage front line staff to remain silent, the intimidation thwarts any attempt to advocate on behalf of those in care. The vulnerable and voiceless remain silent by intention.

We need an active overseer and ombudsman to hold agencies accountable. Mismanagement and inappropriate spending must not be allowed. Direct support funding needs to be a clear priority, along with the oversight to ensure these important monies are applied responsibly to the client. The government has the power to make this happen.

Again I am asking this committee to approve funding for both an Ombudsman for the developmentally disadvantaged in agency care, plus a long-overdue increase in direct supports. The health and integrity of our vulnerable special needs individuals is at risk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

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