

Friends Helping People End Poverty
Pre-budget Submission for
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Amarjot Sandhu, Chair

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and the Ontario Minister of Finance

Hon. Rod Phillips

Friday, January 24, 2020.

c/o Yonge Street Mission
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Toronto, ON
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Friends Helping People End Poverty is a group of people, most of whom have lived experience of poverty. We advocate to end poverty. We began our work in 2015. We have been in dialogue with the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Hon. Todd Smith, on our concerns around social assistance.

Our central aim at this moment is to maintain the current definition of disability for the Ontario Disability Support Program.

We know from experience how difficult it is to be disabled and to not be able to find adequate work. Some of us work part-time, and ODSP gives us stability that is

essential to our well-being. Others are not able to work and depend on ODSP for the vast majority of our income. If people will not be able to access ODSP they will end up losing housing, unable to buy enough food and medical supplements to stay healthy, and costs to government will increase for shelters, health care, and law enforcement.

The disability movement has opened doors to many levels of our society and overcome barriers. ODSP matters for our communities in many, many ways – we need access to the many things that make for a better quality of life: health, employment for those able to work, transit, recreation and others.

It is crucial that the government return to the public for consultation on any proposed changes to the definition of disability. The proposed changes have already caused a lot of stress for members of our community, and if actually carried out will be catastrophic for many.

In addition we would like to add the following recommendations:

- Instead of increasing clawback rates for people with jobs on ODSP, reduce them. In general, people who can work, want to work. The clawback reduces incentives to work, rather than encouraging work.
- Increase social assistance rates to a livable income. Current rates are not enough to live a life. The shelter money given for Ontario Works makes it impossible to rent a room in Toronto.
- Ensure that the new Canada Ontario Housing benefit is adequate to allow people to find housing in relation to their income and the market rent.
- Ensure that the same benefit is not clawed back from people's social assistance payments.
- Strengthen enforcement of workplace laws and regulations, including the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Employment Standards Act.
- Strengthen the definition of harassment in the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include psychological harassment.

We drew inspiration for many of the above recommendations from the pre-budget presentation of the Income Security Advocacy Centre, and thank them for their analysis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Friends Helping People End Poverty