



for January 10th 11:00 a.m.

Who We are

Poverty Free Thunder Bay is an advocacy coalition working for change at the local, provincial and national level to eliminate poverty and its impact on our community. Our membership is broad and diverse, including agencies in the health and community sectors, faith groups, labour and academics, concerned citizens and low income individuals and families. As a community builder, we continue to focus our efforts to engage, educate and act as a catalyst for systemic change and social inclusion.

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Script of Oral Submission

We are members of Poverty Free Thunder Bay's Campaign to increase social assistance rates.

Poverty Free Thunder Bay is an advocacy coalition working for change at the local, provincial and national level to eliminate poverty and its impact on our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this pre-budget consultation.

We respectfully acknowledge that we are meeting on land located on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples, in particular the traditional lands and waters of the Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. We are committed to a relationship with First Nations and Métis peoples based on the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. We will educate ourselves on this responsibility and seek ways to build our relationship as Treaty people.

Realize the First Nations agreed to share the richness of this land. So we are troubled that in Thunder

Bay, Indigenous people made up about 66.5% of homeless individuals enumerated in the Thunder Bay 2020 Point in Time Count. This disproportionate percentage has roots in the inter-generational trauma of colonial systems. To deprive Indigenous people of basic income security and supports is a violation. The Truth and Reconciliation recommendations call for closing the gap in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Income is a social determinate of health. Keeping people so far below the poverty line is despicable. 84.1% of Indigenous peoples in Ontario live off-reserve and the urban Indigenous communities are among the most at-risk groups. If you, our

members of parliament, fail to act , you are participating in the institutional racism of the archaic

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Colonial system. **Fix It !** Increase OW and ODSP rates to reflect real costs of living.

In Canada, the poverty line (Low Income Measure) is \$24,000 for a single person. A single person on Ontario Works gets \$8796 a year, We are expecting single people in need to get out of poverty while living 60% below the poverty line? Shame on Ontario!

Life is bleak in deep poverty. Tax credits and Trillium benefit depend on paper work - another barrier in an unstable situation. Only \$733 a month for full OW benefits. If you have no fixed address, it will be less. Not enough to keep up with rent and utilities and cheapest food. Not enough for bus fare to endless appointments. Not enough for a cell phone to get support services and for job search, a cell phone to call for help and keep contact with family and friends. Imagine young people moving to Thunder Bay with little or no money. The cheap rented room has bedbugs, broken plumbing in the shared bathroom. No security and their ID and clothing are stolen. Imagine trying to break drug addiction when all you can afford is a rented room in a building full of drug addicted tenants and dealers. No matter what you do, you run out of funds. Then what? When people are economically vulnerable they turn to food banks, pawn shops and for some with an addiction - theft, prostitution, or drug deals. Imagine a street person who self-medicates in a hidden nook in the brutally cold weather. Here, extreme cold alerts occur anytime from November to April. Street people have frozen to death. A mattress in an emergency shelter is the band-aid not restoration.

Ontario nutritionists state that the cost to purchase healthy food should not exceed 10-15% of income. Yet in Thunder Bay people on Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works need 21% to 31% of this monthly income for food. One person on Ontario Works would already be \$153 in debt after buying food and paying rent on a bachelor apartment. In 2019, 3000 individuals were on Ontario Works. It wasn't enough money then and it will take more than a cost of living increase to provide

something sustainable. Providing people income and support services they need will result in better health, more productive workforce and a vibrant local economy. For every dollar invested in increasing incomes, the economic return is \$1.30, which is similar to the impact provided by investing in infrastructure.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights says “People in poverty face systemic discrimination in societies that remain deeply segregated by wealth: this calls for systemic remedies to overcome inherited divisions.” Basic income security must be treated as a human right, and not simply as a development goal or welfare program.

A substantial increase in social assistance rates is needed now. To do this, you could revise present regulations and use year end slippage in other parts of the provincial budget to cover an increase in the rates. Then, further substantial increases in social assistance need to be in the 2022-2023 budget. A response to financial needs of people in poverty must be supported by all political parties now, at budget time, throughout the election and in the new government.

The gap between rich and poor has grown for decades, starting with the Canadian governments. Sixty years ago, corporations and individuals contributed approx. equal shares into the government coffers. Today, citizens contribute \$3.50 for every \$1 paid by corporations. Poverty is a failure of society. Canada and Ontario have wealth but are short on revenue to make the changes because wealthy corporations and the ultra-rich pay a smaller share of their income in taxes than middle income earners. Even a 1% increase in the top tax brackets would significantly improve revenue. **With a fairer tax system there would be the revenue for programs to end poverty.**

Until every person in this wealthy province can live a dignified life, can we really say that we live in a just society? It boils down to how we govern ourselves. Good government needs to be responsive, relevant and real for people. This includes the poorest among us. They too have fundamental rights to adequate living expenses and respect. We need to do better to do any good

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