

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
Frost Building North, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
95 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z1

February 12<sup>th</sup> 2021

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

This year Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) marked 100 years of working on the front lines of relief, development and peace initiatives in Canada and around the world. MCC Ontario has an extensive history of building partnerships for health and unity in communities across our province. We are glad to speak into this budget consultation regarding priorities and ideas for a robust economic recovery for Ontario from this position.

Recovering from the current pandemic will be possible for Ontario businesses when the health and wellbeing of our communities are prioritized. People who are mentally and physically healthy, can work productively. People who have housing have freedom to energetically engage service and leisure industries and people with stable employment will use their income to support local business. Healthy communities mean healthy economic growth and recovery, so a plan for economic recovery must begin with a plan to support people. In the upcoming budget, we urge you to prioritize providing financial relief directly to the people of Ontario and to the organizations that support their health and well-being.

During the pandemic, MCC programs have continued to support and engage communities across Ontario. We have witnessed people repeatedly forced to make difficult choices. Choices to work or take time to support their children's learning, go in debt or forfeit on their rent, purchase food at steadily increasing prices, or pay for essential services like dental care. Frontline workers in high-stress situations have put their lives on the line while often being denied a living wage and paid sick days. Add to this the lockdown impact on small businesses and widespread job losses it is no surprise that mental health and addiction issues are skyrocketing. A community under the weight of these factors cannot support a thriving economy.

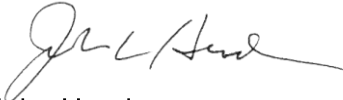
The short-term needs and long-term conditions of low income workers and those marginalised in existing systems must be prioritized. These needs include debt forgiveness, affordable housing, quality proactive pharma care, and supporting technology and training access. As we

come out of this time of struggle, the mental health and addiction issues people are struggling with must be addressed through widespread accessible and affordable services to secure our communities' long-term resiliency.

To this end, frontline agencies are seeing accelerating demands for vital services at a time when their existence is in jeopardy. Organizations are feeling greater pressure to provide assistance and are unable to meet the growing needs. While organizations such as MCC are doing our best to meet communities' needs, for many, the increased demand for programs and services is outstripping our capacity to deliver. Resources need to be allocated to health services everywhere with access for all to keep our communities safe and healthy.

As you shape the 2021 budget, we trust that it will channel assistance to the people and organizations that are the foundation of strong, sustainable communities in which businesses thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Head", written in a cursive style.

John Head  
Executive Director  
Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario

C.C. Doug Ford, Ontario Premier