

**Ministry of Children,
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Services**

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November 25, 2022

Ms. Margaret Smart, Coordinator
Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Programs Advocacy Associate
Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
gregdegrootmaggetti@mcco.ca

Dear Ms. Smart and Mr. deGroot-Maggetti:

Thank you for your letter concerning poverty and social assistance rates in Ontario. I appreciate the time you have taken to share your organization's views and concerns with me.

This government has made significant investments to protect Ontarians from the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, including more than \$1 billion in the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), and expanding access to temporary emergency assistance for those in financial crisis. Emergency shelters, food banks, charities, non-profits, and emergency services which require additional support have accessed the SSRF to help cope with growing demands and extraordinary circumstances. That is in addition to the over \$8.5 billion in social assistance payments we issued in 2021–22.

We recognize the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising costs of living have put significant financial pressures on people, especially for people with disabilities. That is why, as you know, effective September 1 this government delivered on its commitment to increase the rates for income support by five per cent for families and individuals under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), the largest increase in more than a decade.

This increase will help ODSP clients cover increased costs for everyday expenses such as groceries, rent and other essentials. Future ODSP rates will also be adjusted to inflation to help protect against rising living costs moving forward.

For those receiving supports from Ontario Works, we will continue to focus on improving access to employment and training services for people who are able to work.

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Social assistance programs also offer supports and services to help individuals on their path towards employment and greater independence through Employment Ontario, and individuals may receive money to help with costs when participating in employment or activities to help find and keep a job.

Outside of social assistance, there are also a variety of income-tested benefits available to Ontarians, including ODSP and Ontario Works recipients, such as federal and provincial children's benefits and the Ontario Trillium Benefit (a tax-free payment that helps low-to moderate-income Ontario residents pay for energy costs, sales and property tax).

We are also working with our municipal and District Social Services Administration Boards partners on developing a social assistance system that is modern, sustainable, and connects people to the supports they need. Our work across these initiatives all help to deliver on our five-year poverty reduction strategy to connect people with employment, training, health, mental health and housing supports.

Additionally, to ensure that our lowest-earning workers are supported, Ontario's minimum wage was further increased \$15.50 per hour effective October 1, 2022, with future annual increases tied to the Ontario Consumer Price Index.

We are committed to listening and working with individuals, communities, organizations, partners and all levels of government to empower people and support those in need during these challenging times or throughout their journey.

I have also shared your letter with my colleague the Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for his information. Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,



Dr. Merrilee Fullerton
Minister

c: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing