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Charitable # 1191-92763-RR0001

Steven Del Duca, Ontario Liberal Party Leader

Delivered via email June 1st 2022: info.leader@ontarioliberal.ca

Dear Ontario Liberal Party Leader Steven Del Duca,

Our Provincial government continues to keep individuals in the perpetual cycle of poverty.

In the absence of sufficient institutional support, we as community organizations, mutual aid groups, charities, nonprofits and grassroots initiatives shoulder the responsibility of meeting the basic needs of our communities; a need our government creates and sustains.

Ontario's social assistance rates are staggeringly low and have failed to keep up with the cost of living. Our community members have identified increased social assistance rates as one of their top public policy priorities for this and future elections. At current rates, living a dignified and independent life is untenable for those in receipt of ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program) or OW (Ontario Works).

We can no longer afford to subsidize the government's lack of investment in social supports. We are calling on you to commit to fighting systemic poverty by investing in social assistance programs that guarantee a livable income for all people in Ontario.

At The Stop Community Food Centre, out of the 67% of our surveyed service users who rely on social assistance, 52% of them are on ODSP. A single recipient of ODSP will receive \$1,169 to cover their basic needs this month, with only \$497 allocated to housing costs. A single adult on Ontario Works will only receive \$733 this month to cover all their expenses. **Both ODSP and OW [fall below the threshold for what Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy deems to be deep poverty](#) – what significant measures will you take to address this?**

At The Stop, the need is *higher* than it was in the height of the pandemic: with the compounding impacts of unaffordable housing and inflation, we've seen a 30% increase in the total number of individuals served at our food bank between March 2021 and March 2022.

Using data from the Daily Bread Food Bank, [the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary report](#) shows the concrete implications of legislative decisions relating to social assistance rates and wages. The research piece reports that the use of essential services such as food banks demonstrates a direct correlation to increases in rent, and an inverse correlation to disability benefits and minimum wage. Alarming, "a \$30 per month increase in rent would lead to 73,776 more visits to food banks annually in Toronto and 375,512 more visits across Ontario." In other words, **as basic costs such as rent and food increase and as purchasing power decreases, we will continue to see more of our neighbors resorting to the critical support we provide; these are people you represent.**

The report also shows that improved social assistance programs have the opposite effect. In fact, discrete changes such as a mere “\$15 per month increase in Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) would be associated with 53,652 fewer visits to food banks annually in Toronto and 273,099 fewer visits across Ontario”.

It's evident that income-based, institutional interventions are transformative, enhancing individuals' quality of life through a greater sense of agency, improved health outcomes and dignity. Legislation is uniquely capable of making such changes possible, and without them, the need for the essential services we provide will continue to increase, compounded by the rising cost of food, housing and other necessities.

We cannot solve systemic problems by only meeting the immediate needs of our communities and are calling on you to take significant action. We can serve meals, provide food access, offer emergency shelter, deliver skills training, conduct street outreach and help people find work; but ultimately, we can't give our communities access to income that will allow them to buy their own groceries, to pay for accommodation, or support their families. Through our services we can address the symptoms, but not the root causes of some of the defining issues of our society, such as income inequality, homelessness, and food insecurity. **This is why we urge you to improve social assistance programs that are meaningfully informed by the actual cost of living in each region.**

We're already struggling to keep up, and with unprecedented inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, we anticipate needing to shoulder even more of the basic needs burden.

All people in Canada should have the resources they need to live a dignified life. It is an indictment on our society that so many should live so precariously, food-insecure and unhoused. Charities cannot remedy this – **poverty is a policy choice.**

We call on our elected officials to end poverty and help us realize our vision of a society where organizations like ours are no longer necessary.

Sincerely,

The Stop Community Food Centre
The Nourish and Develop Foundation
Sudbury Workers Education and Advocacy Centre
POOF - Protecting ODSP OW Funding
Good Food Impact
The Neighbourhood Group Community Services