

**Ministry of Community
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June 10, 2010

Ms. Gail Nyberg
Chair, Social Assistance Review Advisory Council
c/o Daily Bread Food Bank
191 New Toronto Street
Toronto, Ontario
M8V 2E7

Dear Ms. Nyberg:

I am writing to extend my greatest appreciation and thanks to you, and to all members of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council, for the significant time, dedication and thoughtful consideration you put into your recent report. The insights and advice you have shared will be very helpful as we proceed with our review of Ontario's social assistance system.

In reviewing your report, it became apparent that we share many similar values. For example, we agree that our programs need to embrace the principles of social and economic inclusion, be easier to understand, and be financially sustainable and accountable to taxpayers.

We also agree that employment should be a pathway out of poverty for many individuals. That is why, over the past six years, we have made changes to our programs that encourage employment and independence, such as extending health benefits for people leaving social assistance for employment, and simplifying rules so the more recipients earn, the more money they keep.

However, as your report rightly points out, social assistance is only one piece of the puzzle. Our Poverty Reduction Strategy serves as the foundation for a coordinated provincial effort to improve the lives of low-income Ontarians and families. In recent years, we have made many significant improvements including introducing new tax reforms and consistently increasing minimum wage. We have also created supports, like the Ontario Child Benefit, outside of social assistance to make them available to all low-income families.

We support your statement that changes are needed at the federal level as well. Our government would wholeheartedly welcome the opportunity to continue discussing issues of common interest with the federal government, such as how we can make the employment insurance program work better for Ontarians.

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While we acknowledge and agree there is work to be done, we are proud of the steps we have already taken. As many of our improvements are in line with your recommendations, it is clear we are heading in the right direction.

We are committed to making further progress on social assistance improvements so that our programs can empower low-income Ontarians to break out of the cycle of poverty. However, these are complex issues that require careful consideration on the part of our government. We look forward to announcing our next steps for the social assistance review in the fall, following a thorough analysis of your report and recommendations.

Thank you again for your hard work, and for making this important contribution.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Madeleine Meilleur
Minister