

INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION

ISARC Newsletter

February 2008

Can Poverty Be Reduced, even Eliminated?

The new provincial government committed itself to a poverty reduction strategy and an affordable housing strategy in the 2007 political campaign. Reports from the consultations held by Hon. Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance, indicated that poverty reduction came through loudly from many sectors, not just faith communities and social services. Reports from the pre-budgetary hearing also indicated substantial advocacy for poverty reduction and affordable housing.

The provincial cabinet committee on poverty reduction has met. Hon. Deb Matthews MPP from London is the minister chairing this committee. Currently there are few reports and speaking engagements as the committee works at the strategy for consultations and addressing poverty reduction. But local groups need to prepare during this quiet time. Consultations are expected between April and June 2008.

If your MPP is a member of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, please call and/or write to express your concern that poverty be reduced, even eliminated. Members of the cabinet committee include:

- Deb Matthews MPP London North –chairperson
- George Smitherman MPP Toronto Centre
- Bas Balkissoon MPP Scarborough Rouge River
- Bruce Crozier, MPP Essex
- Carol Mitchell, MPP Huron-Bruce
- Chris Bentley, MPP London West
- David Oraziotti, MPP Sault St Marie
- Dwight Duncan MPP Windsor-Tecumseh
- Jim Watson MPP Ottawa West-Nepean
- John Millow MPP Kitchener Centre
- Kathleen Wynne MPP Don Valley West
- Lou Rinaldi MPP Northumberland-Quinte West
- Madeleine Meilleur MPP Ottawa-Vanier
- Michael Chan, MPP Markham-Unionville

ISARC's presentation to the Ontario Legislative Committee on Economics and Financial Affairs can be found on our web site www.isarc.ca We advocated for increased social assistance as well as changes in regulations to assist individuals and families who are working, more provincial monies for affordable housing, and better labour standards and regulations, especially for temporary employment agencies. These three issues plus child care continue to be the highest priorities.

Many are hoping for a "down payment" on the poverty reduction strategy in the coming provincial budget which is expected the week of March 17, 2008. In the Throne Speech, the government announced increased dental benefits. This along with increased social assistance benefits and affordable housing would be a helpful down payment.

Religious Leaders' Forum on Wednesday, 16 April 2008

The Religious Leaders' Forum will feature Rene Renaud-Lauze from Collectif pour un Quebec sans Pauvrete; he has been very involved with the Quebec law to eliminate poverty in the province. This law has had a very positive effect with Quebec poverty being significantly reduced. The advocacy coalitions continue to work as their provincial government wishes to pursue other priorities.

Rabbi Shalom Schachter from Peterborough and Toronto will bring the theological reflection. In the afternoon, participants will hear how faith groups—Hamilton, Kingston, Niagara, Peel, and Waterloo -- are working with their regional governments, Members of the Provincial Parliament, and other coalitions to advocate as well as reduce poverty in local regions. ISARC is hoping that faith communities will join other community coalitions as all prepare for the poverty reduction coalitions.

We are in contact with Hon. Deb Matthews MPP and have asked her to inform ISARC participants about her hopes and plans for the consultation process. Many MPPs will be joining us in the late morning and for lunch.

Send your name, address, phone, e-mail, faith group affiliation, and current MPP along with \$40 to Brice Balmer at the address below. A flyer will be sent very soon. We are again at Queen's Park in Rooms 228-230 which means we can only accommodate 100 participants. So send in your registration before 11 April 2008.

Brice Balmer working full time for ISARC

Brice Balmer has been working as secretary for ISARC one day a week for a number of years. Through faith community donations and a grant from Atkinson Foundation, ISARC has hired Brice to work full time on the Ontario poverty reduction strategy, to increase the multifaith nature of ISARC, and to facilitate interfaith social justice groups across Ontario.

Contact information is:

Brice Balmer, ISARC secretary
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
P.O. Box 43011, Kitchener, Ontario N2H 6S9
(519) 744-5868
isarc@gto.net
www.isarc.ca

Lives Still in the Balance

Lives Still in the Balance is an excellent background resource as local coalitions prepare for the poverty reduction consultations. Little has changed since publication last spring.

You can also take the book to professors of social work and sociology as a great resource for classes on poverty in Ontario. It's up-to-date and acquaints students with issues faced by workers on low wages and individuals and families on social assistance. Poverty is not just about income, but affects housing, health, employment, safety, etc. This book details the complexity and difficulty of living on low incomes.

See attached flyer.

"25 in 5" Seminar on Monday, 14 April 2008

"25 in 5" means a 25% reduction in poverty in 5 years! They are advocating for solid programs with clear indicators that poverty has been reduced. A wide coalition of groups is working together on this initiative. 250 people attended the first major gathering on 28 January 08. An all day seminar is planned for 14 April 08 at 900 Bay Street (MacDonald Block). Some ISARC members will be at this forum as we work together with our advocacy partners across the province. More information to follow.