

Remarks for
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Parliamentary Assistant to
Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition)
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Time: TBC
Rooms 228-230, Legislative Building

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Thank you for inviting me to join you today.

And thank you for this opportunity to talk to you about affordable housing – a cornerstone to poverty reduction and social equity.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the hard work that non-profit groups do to improve the lives of those less fortunate than we are.

Groups such as yours ensure strength and diversity in Ontario's communities.

The McGuinty government is also working hard to implement plans for building safe, strong and sustainable communities.

We're achieving this by developing partnerships with Ontario's municipalities and local governments and with non-profit groups as well.

For example, our partnerships with the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and the Co-operative Housing Federation are helping to

identify and deliver resources to strengthen the participation of non-profits and co-ops in the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program.

This partnership has helped to spur the development of 12 housing projects containing 632 units across Ontario.

And faith groups all across Ontario are rising to the challenge to meet this basic need.

In Ottawa, the Westboro Church; in Toronto, the St. Clare Multi-Faith Housing Society; and the London Interfaith Team – or LIFT – are participants in the Affordable Housing Program delivering quality affordable housing in their communities.

These partnerships are important because governments can't do everything – but together we can make the lives of vulnerable people and those in need a little easier.

That is why Minister Watson and the McGuinty government remain committed to improving affordable housing.

Low-income families, single men and women, senior citizens, victims of domestic violence, persons with developmental disabilities or those with mental illness – all benefit from affordable housing.

The benefits of building affordable housing ripples beyond the people who live there – entire communities reap the rewards of new, safe and sustainable housing.

Every dollar invested in affordable housing generates two dollars in related economic activity and as much as seven dollars in related services and products.

The building of these projects creates jobs and supports local trades and business.

Investment in affordable housing improves job prospects for residents and is a fundamental support for individuals and families trying to break the cycle of poverty.

The province is committed to helping people who live on lower or fixed incomes stay in their home communities.

It provides stability and creates a strong base from which to find a job, raise a family and contribute to a community.

Under the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program federal, provincial and municipal governments have been working together to provide affordable housing, with an investment of more than \$734 million.

So far, nearly 15,000 housing units have been funded and approximately 3,700 housing allowances for people on low-incomes have been provided.

Our government is investing \$622 million to match the funding announced in the federal government's 2009 budget — that mean's a combined investment of \$1.2 billion for housing.

Through this investment, we would renovate 50,000 social housing units and build 4,500 new affordable housing units.

Just recently, in Kingston, we celebrated three more affordable housing projects with a total of 164 units – two projects that are now occupied and one that is starting construction.

And in Brantford, we celebrated the start of construction of four affordable housing projects and the official opening of four others.

These are just two examples of the constant progress being made in providing affordable housing in Ontario.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is also responsible for a number of other important housing programs.

For example, we are delivering close to 35,000 rent supplements, which helps make rent more affordable for Ontario families in need.

I'm very pleased that our government has stabilized funding to the Provincial Rent Bank at \$5 million per year.

The Rent Bank helps vulnerable families cover rent costs for up to two months — and we have helped more than 21,500 Ontario families stay in their homes.

Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

One of the commitments in our government's Poverty Reduction Strategy is the development of a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

Toward that end, we launched a series of province-wide consultations in June.

The 13th and final public consultation session was held in Thunder Bay on September 30.

I had the opportunity to attend several of these consultations and talk to Ontarians from all walks of life.

We met with housing industry experts, anti-poverty advocates, municipal partners and other interested individuals and groups.

And, not least of all, with members of the public whose input is crucial as we develop a sustainable, long-term approach to affordable housing in Ontario.

These consultations went extremely well and were very engaging discussions.

Many interesting ideas were brought forward – these roundtables were a great opportunity to look at the issues that are critical to specific groups.

In the spring of 2010 Minister Watson will release the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy which will provide a framework for affordable housing in Ontario over the next 10 years.

Our goal is to continue working with our partners to find pragmatic, specific and affordable solutions that will meet the housing needs of all Ontarians.

Conclusion

As I said earlier, our government's goal is to strengthen our partnerships and develop tools for communities to thrive and grow in a sustainable manner.

We will continue to work diligently to support the diverse housing needs of Ontarians and provide housing assistance to our most vulnerable citizens who need a helping hand.

And we will continue to cultivate partnerships with groups that share these goals.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to discuss these important matters with you.