



It takes a village to raise a child
a familiar saying, perhaps all of us need the village

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and
Economic Affairs

January 26, 2010

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ISARC

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

"Faith Communities In Action Against Poverty"



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“We must have all hands on deck.”

From an interview with Minister Deb Matthews
MPP by Cathy Vine, Executive Director of the
Voices for Children, February 12, 2008

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) and its members appreciate the work of this government as it establishes the full day Junior and Senior Kindergarten in our school systems, Ontario Child Benefit, Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and the poverty reduction law, affordable housing consultations, and now the social assistance review process.

These are promises from the Liberal Party election platform of 2007. We are glad that promises are being kept and encourage the government to make a substantial down payment to decrease poverty and implement the strategies and policies.

Since people on low incomes spend their money locally, this can be an important part of ending the current recession.

ISARC VALUES

Human Dignity

- The right of all people and their communities to be treated with justice, love, compassion, and respect, and their responsibility to treat others likewise.

Mutual Responsibility

- The obligation of communities to care and share with their people, ensuring that basic needs are met.

Social Equity

- The right of all people to adequate access to basic resources, to full participation in the life and decision-making of their communities.

Economic Equity

- The right of all people and communities to adequate access to the resources necessary for full lives, including access to worthwhile work, fair employment considerations, and income-security provisions, and our communal responsibilities to use such resources responsibly.

Fiscal Fairness

- The right of all people, communities, and institutions to fair fiscal treatment and the responsibility of all to contribute fairly for the well-being of all.

Ecological Sustainability

- The obligation of communities to practice responsible stewardship of the earth and its environment, so that creation might be preserved for generations to come.

This submission highlights four areas, which need attention in the 2010 Ontario budget:

- Child care
- Affordable housing
- Income security
- Equity and anti-racism directorate

Child Care:

Our regions are in the process of reducing child care spaces because they have not been assured that the subsidy of \$64 million for 7600 child care spaces will remain after June 2010. ISARC appreciates the \$18 million subsidy, which continues this program until June 30, 2010. Even before this possible reduction, there are parents waiting for subsidized child care. Without child care, some parents may not be able to return to work. They will also be searching for alternatives, which will involve unregulated child care. If children are our most precious resource and if working adults are vital to a restored economy, how can we not provide the necessary funding?

The 2010 provincial budget is the time to take action. It has become increasingly apparent that the federal government will not restore funds through the Best Start program. Our children and working parents should not suffer.

Because of the positive changes coming through the full day junior and senior kindergarten program, child care providers will go through significant re-structuring and will need financial support. Children under 4 years require more intense care. With the future increase of children 3 years old and younger, a higher adult to child ratio is needed. Are there funds to assist child care centres adapt to this new reality? Will the province be studying how the full day kindergarten will impact child care centres?

ISARC is aware of regions planning to cut back child care subsidies. We have heard of some day care centres contemplating closing. How can the

province maintain and increase both the quality and quantity of day care and subsidies that we now have in Ontario, so parents can work and re-build our economy?

Affordable Housing:

The provincial affordable housing strategy will be released in late spring / early summer of 2010. There needs to be money in the budget for this strategy. ISARC is aware that significant funds are only now being released from the federal government. However, we urge the government to make a down payment of \$250 million of its own money toward this strategy. Affordable housing is a primary *social determinant of health* which individuals and families need in order to break the cycle of poverty, complete training programs, and enter the job market. Affordable housing provides children with the stability they need to feel confident and do well in school.

Many faith groups have affordable housing development corporations. These organizations are working with our municipalities to provide appropriate and necessary units. Our municipal governments have a clear sense of the needs of our communities. ISARC requests that the municipalities be included in determining rules and regulations for affordable housing programs and development. We also request that the municipalities receive allocations and then select the appropriate developers for local housing units. The province is more removed and is less able to determine which developers and populations are most appropriate. We recommend following the Federation of Canadian Municipalities national action plan, "Sustaining the Momentum: Recommendations for a National Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness."

Currently non-profit affordable housing providers are finding it difficult to increase the number of social assistance tenants in their complexes because the housing allowance paid is only a portion of the 30% of income that other tenants pay. If the province provides the maximum shelter allowance for these tenants, the financial problems and deficits would decrease.

Because many people have lived “on the streets” for a number of years, the *Hostels to Homes* program (H2H) needs to be continued. This program has helped many individuals move to a permanent residence. This is not only a housing program but has the added benefit of increasing the health of individuals and decreasing the need for policing. With stable homes, people start working toward positive personal goals: education, jobs, addiction recovery, etc. ISARC is aware that research supports the continuation and increase for H2H.

Income Security:

The government increased the Ontario Child Benefit in the last budget and ISARC recommends an additional increase to \$125/child / month. This will protect families and their children as they struggle to break the cycle of poverty in this recession. This program applies equally to families with low wage jobs and to those on social assistance.

Our public health agencies and Medical Officers of Health have told us for years that individuals and families on social assistance are unable to *pay the rent and purchase nutritious food*. ISARC recommends the Healthy Food Supplement of \$100 / month/ recipient be immediately implemented. When people have good housing and nutritious food, they stay healthy and do not need to use medical system as frequently. A visit to the doctor or the hospital emergency ward costs more than this Healthy Food Supplement. Perhaps the

government could provide research monies to test the effectiveness of this supplement.

A person who works full time should be able to pay for her basic expenses. Currently a “Living Wage” is approximately \$15.00/ hour (Waterloo Region study); this person can then provide basic necessities but without government supplements; there are no luxuries in this budget. Economists have found that an \$11.00 minimum wage in 2011 would equal the Ontario Minimum Wage in 1995. Through past increases in the Ontario Minimum Wage over the past four years, many low wage workers have become more independent. ISARC recommends the government increase the Ontario Minimum Wage to \$11.00 per hour in 2011.

Equity and anti-racism directorate:

Because poverty has a high correlation with prejudice against peoples of colour, ISARC recommends that the government establish an Equity and Anti-racism Directorate to help embed equity principles, policy frameworks, programs and practices within and across all ministries as well as in the broader public sector.

Conclusion:

Ontario has begun to reduce poverty.

Good ideas are emerging and we are de-mythologizing the idea that poverty is too complex and without solutions. This budget could be a significant down payment on poverty reduction, and would help low income Ontarians reduce the effects of the current recession.

From late February through May 2010, ISARC will be conducting the 2010 Social Audit: talking to people on low incomes in their own neighbourhoods and community centres. We will ask them about the effects of poverty in their lives and how they could break the cycle of poverty for themselves, their families, and neighbours.

Local convening groups, which are holding the audits, will be bringing local reports to MPPs and MPs and holding media conferences. An Ontario 2010 Social Audit report will be available to Members of the Provincial Parliament in the fall of 2010. Federal Members of Parliament from Ontario will also be receiving copies.

“We must have all hands on deck.”

Ontario’s faith communities have been “on deck” for generations trying to eliminate poverty in local communities and in Ontario. Since 1986, Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition has held discussions with legislators and government staff as well as among the faith communities in the search to establish justice and eliminate poverty.

During the recessions of the mid 1980’s and early 1990’s, faith groups have established emergency housing, food banks, soup kitchens, and other survival services. Governments have assured the faith groups that these services would be a temporary. Some services are now

25 years old; volunteers are tired; some faith groups are struggling with decreased donations and increased community need as many families and individuals continue to suffer economically and are unable to provide the housing and food they need.

We invite the government to join us in having all hands on deck.

Justice demands it.

The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform

Coalition (ISARC) was formed in 1986, and was born out of the hope that together a coalition of faith groups could contribute to new public policies based on greater justice and dignity for Ontarians marginalized by poverty. ISARC's membership includes Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Unitarians.

ISARC brings together representatives and members of faith groups to address public policies on issues of poverty, hunger, and homelessness in Ontario. In working to promote justice, ISARC hopes to inspire people of faith to respond to their neighbours in need through promoting social justice in concert with their acts of charity.

This central message, shared by religious communities throughout the world, inspires people of faith to respond to our neighbours in need.

- For Jews, we are to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Leviticus 19.17)
- For Muslims, "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself." (Hadeeth/Sunnah)
- For Christians, we are to "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22.39)
- For Buddhists, we should "Hurt not others, in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (Udana-Varga 5.18)
- For Unitarian Universalists, we are to affirm the "worth and dignity of every person."
- For Hindus, "Behave with others as you would with yourself. Look upon all living beings as your bosom friend, for in all of them there resides one soul. All are part of that Universal Soul. A person who believes that all are his soul mates and loves them all alike never feels lonely. The divine qualities of forgiveness, compassion and service will make him loveable in the eyes of all. He will experience intense joy throughout his life". (Yajur Veda 40 – 6)

ISARC MEMBER COMMUNITIES

- Anglican Church of Canada
- Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec
- Buddhist Community of Greater Toronto
- Canadian Council for Reform Judaism
- Canadian Council of Imams
- Canadian Hindu Heritage Centre
- Canadian Islamic Congress
- Canadian Jewish Congress
- Canadian Religious Conference
- Canadian Unitarian Council
- Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice
- Council of Canadian Hindus
- Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada
- Darchei Noam Reconstructionist Synagogue
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
- Islamic Humanitarian Service
- Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario
- Ontario Coalition for Social Justice
- Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada
- Presbyterian Church in Canada
- The Salvation Army
- Sisters of Providence, Kingston
- Society of Friends (Quakers)
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- Toronto Board of Rabbis
- United Church of Canada

When anyone is hungry while others have too much to eat, when anyone has no shelter while others live in luxury, or when anyone lives in poverty while others enjoy affluence, justice is not present. Where justice is not present, the quality of all our lives and communities disappears.

Justice is the mutual responsibility of individuals, communities, and government working together for a better future.

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