

CANCELLATION OF BASIC INCOME PILOT PUTS FAR TOO MANY AT GREATER RISK: POVERTY ROUNDTABLE

This is an open letter to MPP Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Community and Social Services

Dear Minister MacLeod, We are writing in response to your government's decision to end the Basic Income Pilot program in Ontario. We strongly disagree with your decision to end this pilot prematurely and without regard for the demonstrably positive impact that this program was having upon the lives of people living in poverty in our province.

As such, we respectfully urge you to reconsider a policy decision that will only serve to deepen the experience of poverty for millions of Ontario's children, families and seniors.

The Halton Poverty Roundtable is a registered charity and a leader in connecting, educating and acting on issues related to poverty in Halton. In our community, one in 10 of our neighbours do not know where their next meal will come from and one in three seniors are living below the poverty line.

Our communities of Oakville, Burlington, Milton and Halton Hills have over 37,000 individuals who struggle daily to survive on low incomes or who live in poverty.

Minister MacLeod, the conclusion of the first phase of the Basic Income Pilot in April of this year, brought

with it an abundance of firsthand accounts of the difference that basic income had made to people's lives. The decision to abandon the pilot will cause needless difficulties for the participants struggling to escape poverty.

Given the initial success of the program, we cannot understand the immediate need for cancellation. Surely, it would have been prudent to conclude the pilot and use the resulting data in the development of social policy.

We are hopeful that your government's announcement to reform social assistance in the next 100 days includes an inclusive and transparent process, collaboration across all sectors and a fulsome consultation process including those living with the challenges of poverty.

As you may know, having a 100-day timeline to reform the entire social assistance program will be met with challenges, including the potential for increases of punitive and ineffective approaches and models being implemented, the reduction of supports under the guise of decreasing resource costs and a lack of understanding of the lived experience of being on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program.

As you embark on this reform, we would like to draw your attention to the living

wage in Halton Region. In order for a family in Halton to cover their basic living expenses, a family of four would have to have both adults working 37.5 hours per week, making \$17.95 per hour. Clearly, minimum wage, Ontario Works and ODSP do not come close to affording recipients a basic standard of living in Halton. Your government's proposed 1.5 per cent increase in social assistance will do little to assist the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The Halton Poverty Roundtable respectfully requests that the Government of Ontario continue the Basic Income Pilot program through to its conclusion before making a final decision as to the efficacy, both socially and financially, of the basic income concept.

In light of the current economic climate in Ontario, the low Canadian dollar, the ongoing trade tariff situation with the United States combined with the cost of living, this is driving uncertainty for the most vulnerable.

Bottom line: you know that it is harder for families to survive, and the cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot program and the cut to our current social assistance program puts far too many at even greater risk.

SARAH SABIHUDDIN, HALTON POVERTY ROUNDTABLE'S DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Q

I am married, but I have separated from my spouse. Can I ask that I continue to live alone in the home we have together while we work things out?

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A relationship breakdown can be very stressful and involve a lot of conflict. It is understandable in some situations that someone would want to live alone, perhaps with the children, and have his or her privacy and security. If you are married, the home in which you live is considered the "matrimonial home". You do not need to be on title for it to be considered a matrimonial home. In fact, a rental property like an apartment can be considered a matrimonial home. You and your spouse can agree, or the court can order that one of you have exclusive possession of the matrimonial home. Ontario's Family Law Act provides for the sorts of factors the courts will consider when determining whether a married spouse should have "exclusive possession" of the matrimonial home, including, without limitation: the best interests of the children, including the effect that a move might have on them; the children's attachment to the neighborhood; if the children are in school, and their attachment to friends; any violence committed against you or your children; you and your spouse's financial situations; and the availability of other suitable and affordable accommodation. Lockyer + Hein LLP is a full service firm that does a lot of family law. We are happy to meet you for a free consultation about your matter at one of our three offices, including 8 Guelph Street, Georgetown, in the Lounsbury Life & Group Insurance Benefits building. Have a great weekend.

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