Cuts made arbitrarily and without input, says social services head

From page 9.

Works was recognized, the province plowed ahead without seeking input from municipalities.

"The province has arbitrarily come out with these cuts without any input whatsoever," she said.

Several measures are being taken to deal with the cutbacks, including continuing a freeze on hiring in the social services department that was implemented during budget deliberations in January.

That hits the department hard, particularly as the region is responsible for administrative tasks such as eligibility reviews and literacy testing for potential welfare recipients, Ms Simmons said.

The cutbacks mean clients will wait longer for service, she said, adding the department has a three-day turnaround target for new cases.

"This means that may increase to four or five (days)," she said.

That's particularly bad news for people in need of assistance, Ms Simmons said: "People are always in crisis (when they apply for assistance). We are their last resort."

Markham Councillor Bill O'Donnell said if waiting times are substantially increased, "these people are just going to disappear".

Mr. Fisch said the effect on social services clients — and the taxpayers who are on the hook for increasing costs — should be the first consideration for the region.

"We have a job to do and we have clients who are really relying on us to do it," he said.

Mr. Hamilton concurs — in a way. He said the goal of both provincial and regional governments is to get people off welfare and into the workforce.

The number of people on welfare in York Region has decreased from more than 10,000 to around 3,300 in the seven years since the Tories took office, he said.

More spending on fraud detection, literacy and drug testing programs and measures to address disability issues is necessary, Mr. Hamilton said.

"There's still 3,300 people who should be working," he said. "We need to help them."

In addition to presenting the ministry with the region's concerns, Mr. Fisch will take up the issue with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

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Health News
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By: Andrew Sommerhalder
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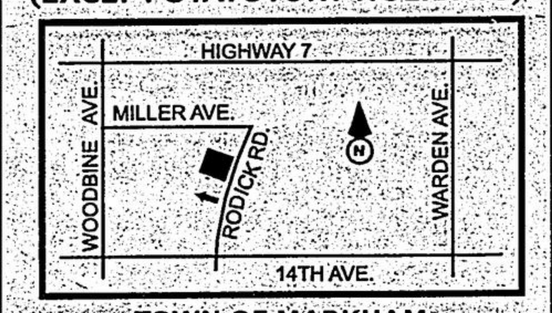

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