



Hon. Todd Smith  
Minister Children, Community and Social Services  
Room 223, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

28 June 2019

Dear Minister Smith:

London, Ontario urgently needs to address poverty. Too many people in our community lack the resources they need to live with dignity and it's holding us all back. Lead by United Way Elgin Middlesex, London for All is our city's roadmap to end poverty. The project has convened more than 150 individuals and community partners to facilitate long-term solutions and systems change. Together, we're creating pathways out of poverty so that all Londoners can participate and thrive.

A number of recommendations being implemented by London for All relate to income and employment. This work includes advocating for adequate, livable rates for people accessing Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. To that end, we want to provide feedback on the definition of disability for the purpose of accessing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) which we understand is under consideration. It is our concern that proposed changes will mean that some individuals who are unable to work due to a disability will not qualify for ODSP.

Restricted access to ODSP will also mean more people will have to rely on Ontario Work (OW), a significantly lower social assistance rate. Systems will be stretched as OW recipients will present with more complex issues, including disabilities and other medical, social and personal barriers. These changes will not only shift costs and responsibilities from the provincial government to less funded and less well-equipped municipalities but means those more in need of support will be put in increasingly vulnerable positions.

Today many individuals with disabilities in our community already struggle to find safe, accessible, housing which they can afford on their monthly ODSP income. Many find themselves homeless, or at-risk of homelessness. Access to the lesser rate provided through OW will make housing and other needs, such as special meals, and medical supplies, out of reach for many vulnerable individuals. This in turn, will put greater strain on those individuals, our healthcare system and all Ontarians as more taxpayer funds will be required to meet the demand for service.

We are concerned that proposed changes to ODSP criteria will have a significant negative impact on those most in need in our community, including destabilizing their housing and their recovery. We also recognize that our city and province as a whole will be impacted. Businesses thrive from having a community which is as healthy as possible. Landlords prosper from stable, supported tenants able to afford their rent and our healthcare system benefits when individuals are able to take preventative measures and stay healthy without accessing costly emergency and acute care services.

For these reasons, we ask that you reconsider any changes to the definition of disability, maintaining the current system of ODSP eligibility.

Sincerely,



Kelly Ziegner  
Chief Executive Officer  
United Way Elgin Middlesex



David Billson  
Chair, Income & Employment Accountability Table  
London for All

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