



Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Ontario Regional Council

VOICE OF THE POOR ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

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SUBMISSION RE: 2018 ONTARIO PROVINCIAL BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a non-profit registered charity that has been serving our neighbours in need since 1846. In Ontario, each year over 5,000 of our volunteers visit more than 170,000 people offering assistance such as friendship, food and furniture vouchers. In partnership with other levels of government, our organization also operates shelters, affordable housing, homes for people with developmental disabilities, and residences for people coping with mental illness or addiction issues.

As a result of our extensive experience visiting people in need throughout Ontario, we are asking that the 2018 Ontario provincial budget contain substantial measures to:

- 1) increase the supply of purpose-built affordable social housing in Ontario, and**
- 2) begin to initiate the reforms recommended in the recently released report *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*.**

Affordable Housing

In our visits to our neighbours in need, we have learned that the largest obstacle most people face is the excessive cost of safe and secure housing. Many studies and reports have confirmed that being under-housed, or poorly housed, leads to the degradation of the person's physical and mental health. It also contributes to creating insurmountable barriers for people seeking to escape poverty and improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

Conversely, through the operation of our various shelters, residences and involvement in the creation and management of an affordable housing building through our affiliated VincenPaul Family Homes Corporation, we have witnessed the profound positive effect the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing has on individuals and families. We have seen people's health restored, families succeed in securing employment and attaining education. These families and individuals are better equipped to contribute and participate in growing Ontario's economy.

We acknowledge that the solution to the affordable housing crisis in Ontario needs to be resolved through various means and approaches. It requires the coordinated participation of the municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as the nonprofit and private sectors.

One approach we are asking to be emphasized in this budget is the creation of purpose-built social housing. Rent supplements, inclusionary zoning measures and incentives to the private sector are very dependent on the availability of private rental housing stock and fluctuating market trends. On the other hand, the creation of dedicated social housing provides affordability on a long-term, continuous basis.

When we participated in the creation of Gower Park Place, a 164 unit affordable housing building opened in 1994, the funding model established 75% of the units to be subsidized as rent geared to income and the remainder to be leased at market rates. The various nonprofit housing providers who participated in this funding model can attest to the success of this approach. The mix of market and subsidized RGI units facilitate a diverse and vibrant community while providing a predictable and stable source of funding for the management and upkeep of the physical asset. The vast majority of the buildings constructed under this model continue to be shining examples of how well social housing can work.

We believe the time is ripe for the re-introduction of this funding model. The federal government's newly released National Housing Policy and the expressed willingness of many municipalities to participate represent an opportunity for the provincial government to step in and coordinate a positive response to Ontario's affordable housing crisis.

Income Security

In our visitations we have seen firsthand how Ontario's social assistance model is failing to meet the demands of changing economic realities. Social assistance can no longer be characterized as a short-term measure to provide a safety net while people seek employment. In fact, many people who are precariously employed live below the poverty line. The bureaucratic, punishing nature of the social assistance regime does little to help people lift themselves out of poverty.

We are encouraged by the recommendations outlined in the recently released report, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*. We endorse the concept that social assistance should be redesigned to encompass a minimum standard income model and extend benefits to all low income households. We believe the report succeeds in outlining a comprehensive, practical, and iterative approach to implementing the recommendations over the next decade.

With this in mind, we urge that the budget contain the elements required to implement the report's recommended measures for 2018. Specifically, an immediate increase in the Standard Flat Rate for those in deepest poverty (as outlined in the report), beneficial changes to rules around earnings and assets, and the establishment of a portable housing benefit.

Raising the social assistance rates for those in deepest poverty, and maximizing the availability of all potential income sources without penalty will help to achieve the ultimate goal of social assistance; lifting people out of poverty and helping them to make meaningful progress. The added income can have a multiplier effect for local economies, when people have more money to spend locally on goods and services.

While we endorse the concept of purpose-built social housing, we recognize that individuals and families require immediate help in accessing safe, secure and affordable housing. The establishment of a housing benefit that would assist low income households access accommodation in the private rental market is an important tool in helping to ease the effects of the current affordable housing crisis.

Conclusion

We believe that in order to achieve the government's stated goal "to create jobs and grow the economy" the budget must contain elements that invest in people, especially the economically vulnerable. Providing affordable housing and adequate income supports will improve the health and wellbeing of thousands of Ontarians, leading to a more vibrant and prosperous Ontario.

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