



Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Ontario Regional
Council

VOICE OF THE POOR ADVOCACY COMMITTEE



Ontario Election 2018

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 5000 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.

Owing to our extensive experience visiting people in need throughout Ontario, we are keenly aware of the challenges and barriers that many people face on a daily basis. We are advocating for the following items to be considered by all parties and candidates in Ontario's upcoming 2018 Election as a means of helping our neighbours in need achieve a better quality of life.

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 and 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. Rent subsidies for people to find housing in the private rental market is an inadequate response to the problem. We believe the solution to the affordable housing crisis needs to include a substantial investment in the provision of purpose-built affordable social housing.

We believe the time is ripe for the Ontario provincial government to coordinate the participation of the municipal, provincial and federal governments, as well as the nonprofit and private sectors, in order to fulfill this objective.

The federal government's newly released National Housing Policy and the expressed willingness of many municipalities to work with other levels of government in order to reduce their excessive affordable housing waiting lists provides a timely opportunity. An investment in the provision of purpose built affordable public housing stimulates the economy by putting people to work and enhances the quality of life for the residents.

As a candidate for the provincial legislature, what will you and your party do to increase the supply of affordable housing in Ontario?

Income Security and Social Assistance Reform

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 employed full time 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 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 support the current Basic Income Pilot Project currently under way in select Ontario communities. This important project provides much needed information and measurable outcomes that will help Ontario make positive reforms to our social assistance model. We hope that all parties support seeing this program through to its conclusion.

We are also encouraged by the recommendations outlined in the *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report. We believe this report succeeds in outlining a practical, comprehensive, step by step approach to implementing social assistance reform over the next decade.

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.

As a candidate for the provincial legislature, what will you and your party support the continuance of the Basic income pilot Project?

Will you and your party support the recommendations outlined in the *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report?

Fair Labour Laws

Ontario's labour laws had become increasingly ill-suited to the realities of our modern economy. Depending on how it is measured, it is estimated that 20% to 30% of all Ontario workers are now engaged in precarious or vulnerable employment. This is characterized by low wages, insecure tenure, involuntary part-time hours, and few or no benefits.

Recognizing the need for reform, in 2015 the government commissioned an expert panel to consider changes to the *Employment Standards Act* and *Labour Relations Act*. After extensive study and consultation with concerned stakeholders the Changing Workplaces Review panel released 173 recommendations that formed the basis of the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017*. Among the highlights: an increase to the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by January 2019, two emergency leave paid days per year and same pay for same work provisions.

We support the gains workers made through Bill 148 and we were among the stakeholders that made submissions to the review panel. We are still advocating for further improvements, such as access to unionization for domestic and agricultural workers, the end of exemptions to minimum wage provisions for students and liquor servers and the establishment of sectoral bargaining that would allow employees of franchised operations to organize and bargain with all franchise holders at the same time.

We would also like to make sure all parties and candidates support maintaining the current improvements contained in Bill 148, especially the establishment of a \$15 an hour minimum wage in 2019. We need to work towards ending the perverse reality that many low wage workers engaged in precarious employment do not earn enough money to raise themselves above the poverty level.

Are you and your party committed to maintaining the measures contained in the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act 2017*, especially the provision to raise Ontario's minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2019?