

Opinion/letter regarding social assistance
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by Kris

Hearing the new minister of social service minister's statement that the best social program is a job made me feel very concerned for my future as I am an ODSP recipient. Her statement and crass attitude in parliament demonstrates a lack of empathy for those living with disabilities; a disregard for our well being; and leaves me with a deep fear that her idea of "fixing the patch work system" that is social assistance is more than likely going to result in the disabled in Ontario being thrown deeper into poverty with an even greater stigma than we already face. It is also gravely disappointing that the minister of social services, a leader in the community, would echo false sentiments about disabled people or those living in poverty, amplifying the narrative that people in poverty are lazy. This heavily leans to discrimination of Ontario's most vulnerable as it sets the example that is acceptable for the public to share this view. We need leaders who strive to lift people out of poverty: not villainize them.

As some one who lives in poverty in Ontario, I can assure you that most people living with disabilities in Ontario, who depend on the Ontario government to help meet our most basic of needs like housing and food, already feel enough shame and self-criticism living with disabilities and feel completely helpless needing to depend on the government. We already live in poverty, 99% of us would rather experience the benefits of having employment, but being disabled and all, holding onto a full time job is very hard: this is why our doctors and medical professionals signed off on our ODSP applications. I feel this new government is creating a war on the poor that is unnecessary as we are not to blame for the state Ontario's finances, and blaming us is simply using us as a scape goat to justify tax cuts.

I am some one who lives with a mental illness. I did not ask to be born this way, I do not feel secure living on ODSP under this new Progressive Conservative government, and it is hard enough paying the bills with what ODSP provides for me, especially during this turbulent time in Canada when the rent prices seem to be rising greater than inflation. Any one living with a mental illness knows how hard it is to receive help as services have faced years of cut backs.

This government campaigned on increasing spending on mental illness, than quick as they were elected, back peddled on that promise. Mental health care in Ontario is in crisis and it is not going to go away any time soon unless we properly commit to funding it the way it should be. Attacking the mentally ill who live on ODSP is only going to send those vulnerable people onto the streets, and when people are homeless, then what? The same people who villainize the poor will be the same people who villainize the homeless, finding it hard to look at them and wishing they would be some where else. Where should I go if I become homeless if I can no longer afford to put a roof over my head?

-Kris