

ODSP Action Coalition for Scarborough

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Ms. Doly Begun
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Legislative Building, Queen's Park

The Hon. Raymond Cho
7 Queen's Park Crescent,
6th Floor, Frost Building South
Toronto, Ontario

October, 2018

Dear Scarborough MPP's,

As members of the ODSP Action Coalition for Scarborough, we are taking this opportunity to write to each of you about matters concerning the lives of the approximately 20,000 recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) who live in Scarborough.

We realize that, as a group of six, you represent the three largest political parties in Ontario and four of you represent the Progressive Conservative party that currently holds a majority mandate in Ontario.

We believe that you are aware that on July 31, 2018, Minister Lisa Macleod deregulated 19 important improvements to the Ontario Works and ODSP programs that would have significantly assisted the lives of ODSP recipients in Scarborough. A list of the 19 improvements is attached. They range from benefit increases to allowing recipients to keep more of the money that they earn from work or receive as help from family.

In announcing the deregulation, The Minister said:

“They (the previous Liberal government) ... rammed through a series of rushed regulatory changes that had more to do with scoring political points than actually helping people.”¹

We respectfully disagree with the Minister in two respects. First, the deregulated improvements would have provided significant assistance to 20,000 ODSP recipients in your ridings. And second, improvements to the lives of ODSP recipients are not and should not be seen as measures to score political points.

You may not be aware that the (unindexed) single ODSP allowance in 1993 was \$930 a month. If adjusted for inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), that single allowance would now be \$1,456 a month.

However, the current single monthly allowance that includes new rate increases for 2018 now stands at \$1,169 a month, \$287 per month or 25% lower than the monthly allowance in place 25 years ago. In real terms, ODSP rates have dropped approximately 1% per year for the last quarter century.

The \$497 maximum shelter allowance cannot pay the rent of *any* apartment currently on the market in Scarborough. This means that with the exception of subsidized housing that houses approximately 2,500 ODSP recipients in Scarborough, 17,500 ODSP recipients that live in your catchments must either share accommodation with others or reside in rooming houses, all of which are illegal within the borders of our district.

On November 8, 2018, Minister MacLeod will release the results of her 100 day review of social assistance in Ontario. We urge you to review this report closely using a Scarborough lens as you deliberate on its findings.

We do not know what will be contained in the report and we understand that on November 8, you, like us, will be reading it for the first time. However we do know that the Minister has commented on her concerns in the Legislature and in newspaper articles.

She has said that she is concerned with fraud, that she is worried about the rate of growth in the ODSP program and has noted that:

“Our plan will support people with disabilities get to work when they are able and participate in their communities.”²

¹ <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/guest-column-reforming-ontarios-broken-social-assistance-system>

² *ibid*

Although these words may sound hopeful, we feel that we have grounds for apprehension given that the Minister (on the same days as her words above), cancelled higher earnings exemptions for ODSP recipients, ended new provisions that would allow recipients to save and curtailed the amounts of support that families might provide to their loved ones in receipt of ODSP.

On the assumption of equal distribution, each of you has approximately 3,000 ODSP recipients in your respective ridings. Their lives are important. Scarborough's unique profile as a high cost District in Ontario's costliest city where almost all private market affordable housing is illegal creates special challenges for these constituents.

Accordingly, the adequacy and fairness of Ontario's only program designed to meet the needs of low income persons with disabilities are issues that should transcend politics.

In closing, we are asking you as Scarborough MPP's to closely monitor comments made by the government within the review period and to support improvements while rejecting expected further restrictions that may be placed on the ODSP program following the release of Minister MacLeod's report.

We eagerly anticipate your response to this letter.

Yours Truly,

Signed

Members of the ODSP Action Coalition for Scarborough