

The Honourable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z1
January 19, 2017

Dear Mr. Sousa,

St. Stephen's Community House is a nonprofit multi-service charity in downtown west Toronto. We serve a range of low-income Ontarians, including children, youth, seniors, newcomers, people who are homeless and people on social assistance. St. Stephen's is on the front line of the impacts of growing inequality in Toronto, and we engage with our participants on issues of income security, affordable childcare and affordable housing. This letter includes a number of recommendations for Budget 2017, informed by our participants.

We congratulate the Ontario Government for setting a **poverty reduction agenda**, creating an **anti-racism directorate**, and for important initiatives such as **full day kindergarten** and **free tuition for post-secondary education** for low income families.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the upcoming provincial budget. In order to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty, we suggest the following budget priorities:

- We support investment in **youth employment and youth work placements**. In 2016, we released a research report on youth unemployment: "*Tired of the Hustle: Youth Voices on Unemployment*" where youth made six recommendations to reduce youth unemployment in low-income neighbourhoods. They suggest improvements to school curriculum, community economic development, and better youth work placements to enter the workforce. We value the important investments of the province such as the **Youth Employment Fund**.
- We ask that you continue to increase funding to municipalities specifically to **create more subsidized childcare spaces** across Ontario. In our Childcare program many local parents are waiting for a subsidy. There are currently more than 17,000 children on the Toronto subsidy waiting list.
- We agree with the urgent need for **26,000 new units of supportive housing** in Ontario, as has been recommended by Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO). We support the need for 1% of the Ontario budget being used to build new **affordable housing** and to create portable housing allowances for low income families.

- We support the requests of the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) and the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) to invest \$1 billion more in **social assistance** this coming year to achieve a 10 per cent increase in rates. **Emergency assistance** is needed quickly for individuals and families living on social assistance. These investments will improve the health and dignity of low-income people and the money will be reinvested in the local economy.
- We ask you to **fund the real cost of program delivery**. As an organization that partners with the provincial government, we have not had any cost of living increases since 2010. This has resulted in cuts to services and precarious work for employees in the non-profit sector. We are requesting a **2.5% funding increase for transfer payment agencies** – which some broader public sector partners have already received. It is time for government to pay for the services they engage community nonprofits to deliver.
- Finally, we have collected 140 signatures for a petition created by the Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC) calling for the extension of **public dental care for low-income adults including low-income workers**. When people go without dental care it causes unnecessary pain and it impacts our health care system and our economy in lost productivity.

We look to the Ontario Government for significant investments in poverty reduction. St. Stephen's Community House supports fair and progressive taxation, including higher income and corporate taxes to help build and maintain a more equitable society. If you have any questions, you may reach me at sbill@sschto.ca.

Sincerely,



Bill Sinclair
Executive Director

Cc: Han Dong - MPP Trinity-Spadina

Dr. Eric Hoskins - MPP St. Paul's

David Zimmer – MPP Willowdale