

From: TOM PEARSON [mailto:tpearson61@rogers.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 15, 2008 12:04 PM
To: Kelly, Denis
Subject: deputation

I'm requesting an opportunity for presenting a deputation to the Finance and Administration Committee at its meeting Thursday morning .
Attached are some points of concern for deputation.

Tom Pearson
Chair, Poverty Action for Change Coalition



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Tom Pearson – Chair, PACC-Poverty Action for Change Coalition (York Region)
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Vice-Chair- “Operation Sparrow” – provides opportunities for (low income) kids

Thank-you for the opportunity to present to you in regards to the GTA pooling dollars for social services now being returned to York Region from Toronto.

My name is Tom Pearson and I'm here representing as local chapter Chair of "Make Poverty History" and as well the Poverty Action for Change Coalition - a York Regional community based group made up of hundreds of residents (and representing thousands of York Region residents) including social workers, mental health workers, community development members, church leaders and members, and as well all types including more than 50% of our members who live in poverty in York Region. These members are desperate for help any way we can bring it and you, the elected representatives, have been given a great opportunity to show you understand and care about their dilemmas and families and about the future prosperity of this region.

Frankly I'm a little dismayed that there is even a discussion that these dollars previously slated for social services, are even being considered to be spent elsewhere - as this region is in dire need of aid in this area. Social service program dollars have been extremely rare in the past and as a result many services have been cut or eliminated entirely.

According to a recent census there is an affordable housing crisis in York region with over a 5 year waiting list for affordable housing (12 years for families!), yet we ignore this or try to address the problem with band-aid solutions such as building only 50 units in the whole of the region in 2008 when 5,500 households representing over 15,000 people are on the waiting list to get in, and by building more shelters. We have witnessed time and again families and individuals being evicted simply because they cannot afford their bills - with rent being the most damaging one and often taking up more than 50% of their household income. Often this happens when an illness has occurred and when our current Homeless prevention programs deem them ineligible because - ironically- they don't make enough money to qualify or their rent is deemed too high! Do you know the stigma a child, or teen faces when uprooted to a hostel or other temporary housing situation? The school dilemma? The mental anguish and stress and humiliation felt by these families and individuals? They will need counseling services, legal services and other social service aids during and after their evictions but there simply aren't enough and with the recent provincial budget completely ignoring probably the fastest growing need – that being mental health assistance as well- this is no time to ignore it!

The lack of affordable housing exasperates and magnifies other social service problems the region faces such as lack of affordable youth programs and education access, transportation - particularly for the disabled who have no access to any transportation currently after 10 PM in York Region (cabs are not wheelchair accessible like other municipalities) limiting them for work, socializing - a necessity for mental health stability- and even access to hospitals what with 10 hour waiting periods not unheard of currently thus leaving them unable to either go when needed (without incurring a huge ambulance cost) or to get home off hours. This is outrageous. Why should our residents who happened to have a disability be left out of all these or risk compromising their health? This is what you call a crisis for them. Right now.

We need to invest in our social programs and transportation, especially in the Northern York Region where residents are not just a hop skip and jump from Toronto or even Richmond Hill. A Georgina resident for example needing legal help to avoid eviction or to fight having disability support or welfare cut off for their families should not have to travel to R Hill (hours by bus) for access let alone pay the extra to get there and back. These are people to whom \$5 may as well be \$500 and who often have children to take with them as well. To the south, and increasingly the north as well in the region, we need more programs for new immigrants including interpreters for employment purposes, English language programs, and other assist vehicles for our growing immigrant residents. These are all essential social services not being addressed at any level of government currently to any degree other than bandaid level and will lead to an increase in poverty and cost to the region if not tackled immediately with whatever we have.

What surprises me is that members of this council are even considering putting these dollars anywhere but where they belong- in social services-. Surely members read the recent series on poverty that ran right across York Region - called "Below the Line" ? It was full of facts and appalling true life stories by residents, most supplied to them from PACC, that spelled out the numerous crisis problems some residents are experiencing and now including some losing their children, essentially because they couldn't find an affordable accommodation. One only needs to check your newspapers for apartments to see 1 bedroom, let alone 2 or three for a single parent, goes for \$900 these days. Perhaps the members would like a copy of PACC's published book – Voices from The Edge; living in poverty in York Region should they have missed that series.

This is an absolute disgrace that one of the richest Countries in the world allows its own residents to exist like this, when we have it within our means to change it. The call from the Regional Council has always been that we have no money (for social services) because its all sent to Toronto...well that isn't the case now so use it for what it was supposed to be used for

PACC is currently embroiled with various movements to address these poverty issues and will be also addressing the new provincial poverty reduction strategy committee very soon and we'd love to add to that a legacy of York Region leadership on the issue.

Let's do the right thing here and assist your most vulnerable residents by putting every cent of that money where it is most needed and belongs that is into social services – not debt reduction. We can reduce debt by aiding our marginalized residents so that they can become more productive, active (through step up programs) and stabilized through this aid. It is up to you all to do the right thing and doing the right thing never hurts at the voters pool either come that time – not that that should be the reason to vote your conscience on this crisis issue.

Tom Pearson