

Ministry of Children
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AUG 12 2008

Mr. Bill Fisch
Chairman and CEO
The Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
PO Box 147
Newmarket, Ontario
L3Y 6Z1

Dear Mr. ^{Bill}~~Fisch~~:

Thank you for your letter on behalf of York Regional Council regarding poverty reduction and for sharing the *Key Policy Directions for the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy* report.

I've taken note of your suggestions, including the need for a coordinated approach consisting of municipality partners, community and health services departments. I assure you that I'll keep your suggestions in mind.

This government is taking the initiative to build a poverty reduction strategy that will make a difference. We're developing a comprehensive strategy that will help all Ontarians achieve their full potential because we want everyone to have the opportunity to succeed.

We're committed to developing poverty measures and targets within the first year of our mandate. This is an important step in developing a provincial poverty reduction strategy. We're taking a comprehensive and coordinated approach, and we'll work together to make Ontario a stronger place for everyone.

As you know, we created the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB), a \$2.1 billion commitment to help low-income families and their children. The OCB treats all children in eligible families equally, regardless of whether or not their parents receive social assistance. The ongoing support provided by this program helps parents make the transition to work because they continue to be eligible for the OCB after leaving social assistance.

In July 2007, the OCB provided eligible low-income families with a special one-time down payment of up to \$250 per child. This year, the OCB will provide eligible families with up to \$600 per child, and this amount will grow to up to \$1,100 per child annually once the program is fully implemented in 2011. At that time, the OCB will reach 1.3 million children in 600,000 low-income families across Ontario.

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We're also moving forward with a \$135 million plan to provide dental benefits to low-income families. Public health units, community health centres, dentists and dental hygienists will provide prevention and treatment services so that dental health doesn't become a barrier to opportunity.

We want to make investments where they'll do the most good – addressing basic needs such as housing. In January 2008, the Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families (ROOF) program, a new \$185 million housing allowance, began helping low-income working families with children pay their rent. This program is targeted to create more than 27,000 new housing allowances that will provide families with up to \$100 per month for a maximum of five years, making housing more affordable for those in greatest need.

The 2008 Budget included \$100 million to assist with repairs to about 4,000 affordable housing units. We're also making up to \$500 million in low-cost loans available to Ontario municipalities such as York to make it easier for them to repair social housing.

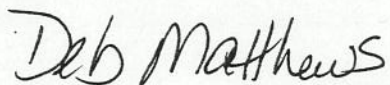
On March 31, 2008, Ontario's minimum wage increased to \$8.75, which is the fifth increase since 2004. Social assistance rates are going to go up by two per cent again this year, the fourth increase in as many years.

Our government recognizes that to address poverty we'll need all hands on deck – commitment from community partners, government and individuals. We know that we need to continue to work together to find solutions to the many issues facing Ontarians. We also know that we need a range of strategies to address the causes of poverty.

Our government wants to hear from as many people as possible from across Ontario's many diverse communities. We're encouraging people to visit www.Ontario.ca/GrowingStronger where they can find more information about our plans and share their ideas about tackling poverty.

Thank you again for sharing your report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Matthews
Minister