



Conseil des Services du District de
Manitoulin-Sudbury
District Services Board

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May 8, 2009

Mr. Ron Dupuis, Chair
Sudbury & District Health Unit
1300 Paris Street
Sudbury ON P3E 3A3

Dear Mr. Dupuis:

Re: SDHU "Food in the Budget" Resolution

Outside of the City of Greater Sudbury proper, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Social Services Board (DSSAB) is the provincially mandated municipal service manager responsible for the local planning, coordination and delivery of Ontario Works, Social Housing, Child Care and Land Ambulance services to the eighteen municipalities and unorganized townships (TWOMO) that make up the Manitoulin and Sudbury Districts.

While the above may not be known to all of your Board members, it is well known to your Administration. I believe it also provides some of the contextual background necessary to appreciate this DSSAB's already expressed disappointment in receiving a copy of said resolution without the benefit of any prior consultation on the matter.

Our Board dedicated a good deal of time to a round table discussion of your resolution at its April 23rd meeting. The expressed views of the elected municipal representatives that sit at our Board table are recorded in item 8.0 of the minutes of our April 23rd meeting: minutes that can be accessed at our www.msdsb.net website. Also referenced in those minutes is a copy of our DSSAB's [Living on Social Assistance in 2009 ... Food for Thought](#) report. It clearly identifies the income people on social assistance receive to live on.

As DSSAB Chair, I was given the task of providing you and our member municipalities a summarized view of our DSSAB's views on the "Food in the Budget" resolution and, to that end, advance the following.

There is no disputing that people on social assistance have a very difficult time making ends meet when it comes to their basic food, clothing and shelter needs. Poverty, we can agree, comes from a lack of income. It means that those who live in poverty experience deprivation and are unable to purchase basic goods and necessities. It means that access to goods and services that most of us take for granted are out of reach: access to employment, local commercial services, affordable recreational opportunities, as well as a lack of affordable housing.

Poverty, as the consultations on the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy have pointed out, is a multi-dimensional issue that requires action on several fronts. It is essential that we recognize the interactions among housing, social assistance, income support, retraining programs and health care. All of these have a role to play in an integrated strategy aimed at reducing poverty.

Our DSSAB, in its role as the manager of a host of human services, can speak to the fact that housing is in many ways more relevant to poverty reduction than any other single factor. First, as the single largest expenditure in a household's budget, housing costs can crowd out other necessities and exacerbate an already inadequate income. On average an astonishing one in five tenant households are spending more than 50% of their income on rent. Over 260,000 households in Ontario are choosing to either "pay the rent or feed the kids".

Second, poverty issues often manifest themselves with the creation of concentrations of poverty which is directly linked to housing markets and housing assistance. The size of the gap between the cost of housing and incomes leads to what is now termed as "housing induced poverty". As you might expect, and given the backdrop of the economic situation, the news is not good. While poverty occurs at an individual or household level, its existence becomes visible when poor families and households cluster in geographic areas that in turn become marginalized. Economically challenged communities bear the brunt of unemployment, business failures, family stress, crime, substance abuse, deteriorated housing and poor health.

Experience has taught us that programs that direct solutions only at the individual are not as likely to be as effective as programs that are directed at assisting both the individual and the community to become stronger.

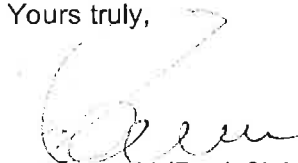
Our DSSAB is in the social assistance business and while it is not adverse to an increase in the amount families on social assistance receive, it questions if the directed investment you are advocating is the best place for its member municipalities to direct the additional \$120,000 of property taxes that their 20% share of the cost of this initiative would require for our DSSAB alone. It believes the desired end might be better met through other means than that proposed.

Our DSSAB's Administration is increasingly of the opinion that safe and affordable housing must be at the heart of Government's poverty reduction strategy. When people have an adequate, affordable place to call home they can seek and find a job, establish their children at school and maintain a healthy household. There are a number of ways that housing can assist in reducing poverty. The first is at the individual level and involves reducing housing costs through support mechanisms such as rent supplements, a housing benefit or rent geared to income assistance.

The key policy challenge that we are all faced with is to identify and implement the appropriate programs. This clearly indicates that a multi-pronged solution is required.

This in our opinion speaks to the importance of ensuring that SDHU and the DSSAB work more closely together given the importance of the provincially mandated responsibilities we share when it comes to the enhancement and sustainability of the community health and social services infrastructure of the municipalities that we jointly serve.

Yours truly,



J. Raymond (Ray) Chénier, Chair

c. DSSAB member municipalities