



**Ontario Municipal Social  
Services Association**

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March 4, 2015

Sent via email to: [Richard.Steele@ontario.ca](mailto:Richard.Steele@ontario.ca)

Richard Steele  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Social Assistance Operations Branch  
Ministry of Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto ON M7A1E9

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your correspondence of February 12<sup>th</sup>.

While there is still quite a distance to go to get to a reasonable level of functionality, you and the Ministry have undertaken a number of encouraging and important steps to support improving SAMS. We have heard from members that the site visits by Deputy Minister Rubashewsky and senior staff have been productive and that it is clear you are building a better understanding of the experiences of SAMS implementation on clients, staff and organizations alike. In addition, we are also hearing that CMSMs and DSSABs are beginning to see some improvements resulting from the work of the Technical Working Group.

On behalf of OMSSA and our members, thank you and Deputy Minister Rubashewsky for becoming personally involved, taking our concerns seriously and moving quickly to find resolutions. We look forward to getting to a point where we are able to effectively serve clients.

I believe that our efforts to work in partnership have consistently demonstrated that active partnership with OMSSA and as appropriate AMOs and our member CMSMs and DSSABs, is the right and most effective way to work our way through SAMS implementation in the near and long term.

My specific comments and recommendations to your response and to the ongoing initiatives are:

1. We are pleased that the province has offered assurances that SAMS, over time, will support Ontario's social assistance system currently and also support any reform that may evolve. Until that time, however, CMSMs and DSSABs are facing a number of immediate and longer term questions. Most importantly, what are reasonable expectations of good customer service and how to meet customer service standards given our current and medium term reality?

We asked that resources be available until all fixes and design issues were resolved. It is clear given the breadth of technical concerns this will not be possible. CMSMs and DSSABs are therefore now at a point where we need to have a clear understanding of the plan and resources in place at a provincial level to address implementation concerns. We need to be able to have this information in order to scope out our work planning and together understand our operational reality.

To be clear, we can appreciate that like CMSMs and DSSABs, the province's resources are finite. This means there will be a point where the resources you have at hand through IBM begin to roll back. The province, OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs must be able to plan collaboratively to identify what priorities and efforts need to be in place at this end point to achieve a reasonable and agreed upon state of service functioning and delivery. It is therefore critical that we get a clear sense of when resources will no longer be available.

We appreciate your resource challenges and that you are working on options regarding financial compensation for the cost we have incurred and continue to incur but it is important for us to be clear that our members' request for 100% compensation has not changed.

The question of the future role of CMSMs and DSSABs in social assistance and employment services was asked of you at the most recent meeting of the 47 Leads. We were assured that the plan is status quo.

Given this, as the province and CMSMs and DSSABs alike work towards a better state, we should also begin to start looking at what other reform can be undertaken. And most importantly, to understand what reform, including and beyond SAMS, means to CMSMs and DSSABs. And once we understand this, to plan in a purposeful and effective way.

2. As indicated above, CMSMs and DSSABs have noted the positive impact of the technical fixes resulting from the work of the Technical Working Group. There is still considerable work to be done, and they are simply the most urgent fixes, but we feel we are now headed in a coordinated direction and know what issues at a minimum will be resolved.

The Minister's commitment to assemble a frontline user group is also an important step to addressing the ongoing day to day challenges of front line staff. As you know, concerns exist regarding the perceived employer-employee conflict inherent in the membership. To mitigate this we request the following:

- That the nature of discussions at the table respects the role of CMSMs and DSSABs and ensures that the table is focused on information gathering.
  - We also encourage aligning efforts and priorities with those of the Technical Working Group. This again, only makes sense given the resources and time pressures to ensure improved functioning of SAMS as soon as possible.
  - That a streamlined approach to the initiatives at hand is implemented and that OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs are engaged in a constructive manner to confirm that priorities to fix SAMS make sense on the ground for clients, staff and our organizations.
3. We are pleased that you will continue to work with OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs on extending reducing and limiting reporting requirements. As indicated above, this remains a pressing concern to which the work of the Business Recovery Working Group will be helpful, but as this work develops core administrative relief for CMSMs and DSSABs remains necessary.

We have heard consistently about the need for relief from performance standards and strongly encourage the province to consider doing so for past cases, given that the technical difficulties make this an effort that may not be fruitful. In addition we ask the province to work with OMSSA and its members to identify additional core administration relief opportunities to provide CMSMs and DSSABs breathing room well into 2015 as we continue work with the Business Recovery Working Group.

Having a contingency plan on what administrative requirements and performance measures need to be adjusted is prudent. Addressing these questions now provides an opportunity for CMSMs and DSSABs, as well as the province, to save important time and resources.

4. OMSSA and its members appreciate the deferral of new MCSS initiatives and providing CMSMs and DSSABs engaged in ASI the opportunity to defer renewal. We look forward to ongoing deferrals both in relation to initiatives your ministry may be considering but also across relevant ministries until such time as SAMS functioning is stabilized.
5. We are pleased that in both your response as well as your recent update with CMSMs and DSSABs you are open to and understand the need for training. We hope in the very near future there will be discussions with OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs, as it will be important that training be developed in consultation with us to ensure that what is developed works for frontline staff and clients alike.

We believe that as we move forward on discussions regarding training that consideration on how best to support CMSM and DSSAB needs and supporting business

delivery capacity must be considered. Given the ongoing challenges and strain on resources, we encourage the province to consider investments to provide onsite support as a priority.

6. Thank you for your assurances regarding provincial contingency planning regarding the Ontario Disability Support Program in the event of labour disruptions.

The above provides some important considerations and first steps in the next stages of addressing SAMS functionality and CMSM and DSSAB pressures and capacity concerns.

I also want to note that we acknowledge that in the coming weeks PricewaterhouseCoopers will begin the review of SAMS implementation. As outlined in your letter on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, the focus of the third party review will be to "... evaluate SAMS implementation and to look at ways to improve processes, challenges that may prevent the ministry from meeting its objectives, the effectiveness of current engagement with our staff and service delivery partners, and a go-forward strategy to improve SAMS overall...".

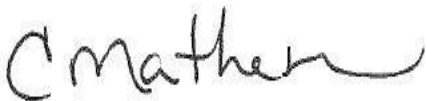
We are pleased to see commitment on these issues and look forward to SAMS achieving the promise of a system that will support CMSMs and DSSABs in doing their work in faster and smarter ways.

It is important to point out, that as partners in Ontario Works and the implementation of SAMS, what is absent from the third party review is understanding the full scope of implementation impacts, including recommendations for remediation to CMSMs and DSSABs.

It will be imperative that the review and recommendations consider the capacity, implications and compensation required both for the province and for CMSMs and DSSABs, both in the immediate term but also in their business recovery. It would be prudent that the review be conducted in consideration with OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs to ensure that the resources invested yield the most effective plan and feasible implementation going forward.

OMSSA looks forward to continuing our efforts together on addressing SAMS.

Sincerely,

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

Catherine Matheson  
President, OMSSA

C: Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Laurie LeBlanc, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
Kira Heineck, Executive Director, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association