

Sent by e-mail to: MinisterMCCSS@ontario.ca

August 5, 2021

The Honourable Merrilee Fullerton
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor, 438 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Fullerton,

On behalf of our members, AMO once again congratulates you on your recent appointment as Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. As you know, AMO represents almost all of the Province's 444 municipal governments. We share a common interest – to build a more prosperous and affordable Ontario.

Transformation of social assistance is timely for an economic and socially inclusive recovery. The impact of COVID-19 has made it necessary to find better ways of serving people. It has opened eyes to new approaches and models. The new recovery and renewal vision should result in better service for residents and communities, with an aim of making them more prosperous and healthier. Creating pathways to greater independence and employment, through municipally delivered life stabilization casework, will improve quality of life outcomes for people, contribute to reducing poverty, and help achieve workforce development goals for communities.

AMO is supportive of the proposed transformations with the right conditions in place and committed to working to co-design the new social assistance program. We look forward to continuing involvement with the government every step of the way in the ongoing development of policy, regulation, and funding decisions to successfully implement the vision.

Municipal governments are well-positioned to provide integrated human services to people while the Ontario government is the appropriate primary funder for provincial income support programs. AMO is pleased with the commitment by the government to implement social assistance transformation in ways that meet the needs of people and communities, and protect municipal governments from increasing social assistance costs on the property tax base. To date, the government has sought to provide assurances about this in which we take some comfort.

I am pleased that your Ministry is actively engaging with AMO and the 47 municipal service managers on both the co-design of the new social assistance model and a vision for human services integration. It is truly an unprecedented process. Your Ministry staff are making a great effort to make this happen. Municipal staff from across the province

are devoting a great deal of time and effort to the process, contributing their expertise and knowledge of what works on the ground for people in local communities.

Working together we can improve the quality of life for people in Ontario who need these essential human services. We do, however, need adequate time to get it right and learn throughout the process about what will work best. There is much at stake with such a significant transformation. It is critical that there be a seamless transition for clients and that they are well served by an integrated systems approach and not experience challenges with navigating through three separate service points (i.e., financial eligibility and benefits, life stabilization, and employment services).

There is some risk of fragmentation with the newly proposed functional roles and responsibilities, which will need to be carefully considered and mitigated to prevent unintended consequences. People should not have to tell their story multiple times to different case workers and bounced around between separate providers of services. It needs to be a primary consideration. We all share this goal of seamless and integrated service and will continue to work with our best effort through the co-design process to make this happen.

Pursuing human services integration in a deliberative manner through a whole of government approach is essential to achieving the successful outcomes that we are all seeking for the vulnerable people we serve. It is critical that all partner ministries are at the table with the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Services Committee (PMSAEC) and the Human Services Collaborative Table with us including those with employment, housing, child care, education, justice, corrections, and health responsibilities.

Of utmost importance, the Ministry of Health is needed as a fully engaged partner. It is understandable given the immediacy of the pandemic response; however, social assistance and health care transformation need to be interrelated going forward. For life stabilization to be successful, health supports are essential, especially mental health and addictions services. The Ministry of Health can provide adequate funding and work to secure better connections between municipal services that address the social determinants such as social assistance, housing and child care, with provincial health services including Ontario Health Teams, and mental health and addictions services. Efforts to integrate these municipal and provincially funded health care services need to happen consistently and effectively across the province.

Further, there is a real possibility that achieving life stabilization outcomes may not be supported by access to available health and community services. Many non-profit agencies have been hard hit by the pandemic and are struggling to recover and restore their services. AMO recommends provision of supports to increase the capacity of the non-profit community sector to provide health and social services that are essential for life stabilization, including supportive housing, and mental health and addictions services.

AMO will continue to work with your Ministry to consider additional measures to reduce poverty and help people afford their housing over the long-term. This could be funded by reinvesting some of the realized program savings into raising benefit rates and indexing to inflation on an annual basis. While not explicitly mentioned in the vision document, we also support ways to decrease and simplify the more than 800 rules governing social assistance financial eligibility to make it easier for people to stabilize their lives and focus on employment, rather than meeting numerous complex requirements for eligibility.

AMO and Ontario's municipal governments look forward to continuing working with you and your colleagues in partnership as we serve the people of Ontario. Regular touchpoints at the AMO-Ontario MOU table will be helpful to keep these efforts on track and aligned with municipal and provincial interests in the outcome.

Sincerely,



Graydon Smith
AMO President
Mayor of the Town of Bracebridge

cc: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
The Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
The Honourable Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills
Development
The Honourable Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General of Ontario
Denise Allyson Cole, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social
Services
Nelson Loureiro, Executive Director of Social Assistance Transformation, Ministry of
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Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
His Worship John Tory, Mayor, City of Toronto
Cathy Cousins, President, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
Michelle Boileau, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Delivers Association (NOSDA)