December 15th, 2014

Richard Steele
Minister of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Assistant Deputy Minister:

RE: NOSDA CONCERNS ABOUT SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SAMS) IMPLEMENTATION

NOSDA members are presently dealing with a variety of difficulties in the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System(SAMS). Lack of program functionality, slow screen change times and ticket resolutions that remain unresolved are negatively impacting staff and clients. These problems are leading to delays in service, increased time demands and problems issuing cheques. Each of our districts have concerns in regards to the implementation of SAMS. Some of the more prominent concerns include staff overtime, the frustration of our clients, lengthy delays in processing and the lack of involvement, in advance of implementation, of our IT and Finance staff.

Attached you will find a list of key issues identified by our members this past week. Our staff has worked diligently to provide this information, in order to improve the situation that we are experiencing. Our representatives on the OMSSA-led sub-committee, namely, Catherine Matheson, Dan McCormick, and Michael Nadeau, will be bringing this information forward through that table.

In the meantime, our Northern staff are working hard to provide assistance to our clientele in a timely manner. The MCSS decisions to provide some workload pressure relief and some administrative funding should be helpful in supporting our frontline staff in the short term.

Sincerely,

Gary Scripnick, President, NOSDA

The *Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association* (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together Northern Ontario's 11 Municipal Service Managers. All eleven are responsible for the local planning, coordination and delivery of a range of community health and social services that the Province of Ontario divested to them to locally manage. These services represent a significant portion of the social infrastructure of all Northern Ontario's municipalities and also account for a good share of the property taxes that Northern Ontario municipalities dedicate to the social support infrastructure of their municipalities.

NOSDA	Issues / Challenges
Rainy River	1. **Shelter:** Caseworkers are trying to add new shelter amounts for November & December in SAMS, not touching old records converted, yet SAMS is picking up old records that were previously end dated in SDMT causing a huge number of incorrect arrears payments. It appears that when conversion occurred the previously end dated records are now open ended and these records are being incorrectly added to new shelter costs being input. The "fixes" that had been implemented have not resolved this issue. Tickets have been logged. 2. **New Applications:** When completing new applications through the Integrated Case it shows case as eligible and passes all eligibility rules yet Caseworkers are unable to Authorize and proceed any further to make case ongoing and produce cheque entitlement. 3. **Unable to add/remove a new member:** When caseworkers attempt to do this they are getting an error "all members must have a relationship". Relationships are already entered in SAMS and dates are correct yet caseworkers are unable to include new members for correct entitlement. Cheques are being issued for applicant only. 4. **Employment Assistance Funding:** I am extremely concerned that we could lose funding due to Employment Outcomes targets NOT being achieved. I am not confident that all employment information affecting this funding is being captured in SAMS due to the ongoing challenges staff are having with it. I would ask that given our extreme challenges in working in SAMS that MCSS forego any "claw backs" due to not achieving targets.
Parry Sound	1. Too many Communications and other SAMS information. It's information overload and staff can't keep up with it 2. Ticket resolutions returned indicating that the problem has been resolved when in fact it hasn't 3. Payment issues - still receiving inappropriate arrears and overpayments caused by data conversion and fixes 4. Extra supports are needed - Province support system is inefficient 5. System degradation is frustrating 6. Some job aids and user guides are not clear or are incorrect; demos would be nice for defect workarounds
Manitoulin-Sudbury	1. Timely response to ticket logged –to date we have not received any response for the tickets we have logged so far. 2. Cognos reports: need to be more accurate and reliable 3. SAMS issues requiring us to issue manual cheques are not getting any better. Up to last Wed we had issued 45 manual cheques. We are now @ 65. 4. Staff morale and trust in SAMS –not getting better. 5. Need more on site support from the Project / Experts.
Cochrane	1. **Financial:** Reports with integrity would ease stress as at present, can't rely on monthly/daily payment reports; Form 5 reporting is delayed meaning that manual tracking (e.g. bank reconciliation) will have staff impact; Arrears produced with no reason on ongoing cases, terminated cases, cases outside of area 2. **Conversion Issues:** Due to complicated evidence issues (merging, data conversion, member relationships), staff are completing paper applications with clients and then attempting to enter this afterwards into SAMS. This causes client service delays, affects staff confidence in product as well as their morale, lack of time to focus on ongoing client issues, productivity; Inability to enter application into SAMS and get client active results in manual cheques that are not in the system. Manual cheques do impact client service

	as this can result in either a delay in receipt if mailed (which is routed through Toronto) or because client is required to pick them up directly at office (distance to offices is detrimental) 3. **Extra support needed**: As a small northern DSSAB, SMEs pulled out of their regular duties to trouble shoot & problem solve; affects workload and stress; Triaging issues, referencing through the various SAMS resources, and ticketing can take hours 4. **Communication**: Multiple communications, difficult to track revisions; Some job aides and user guides are not accurate – should be better tested before sent out 5. **Tickets**: Timely responses needed; Ticket number is not attached to original submission; need to call back and give ticket number and then told what it's related to (waste of staff time on both sides)

Timiskaming	1. **Financial impacts**: Overtime is being worked by management staff (OW program and IT); We have been successful in reducing financial impacts to clients as payments are manually verified prior to issuing. However in each case where excess payments are made there is a direct cost to the municipality of $0.086 per dollar: Staff time off. The department has one caseworker (25% of the caseworker team in that office) that is away on a sick leave. Although we do not measure the impact that SAMS has on personal wellbeing in this case the individual had stated that SAMS implementation was a leading factor. Cost is sick time benefits and productivity loss.
	2. System challenges and client impacts:
	   a. Converted files. Generally, the issues with corrupt data have caused our program to issue a high number of manual payments in order to maintain a satisfactory level of service without unreasonable delays. We can resolve the symptom but the cause remains. Managers and Subject Matter Experts continue to work with staff to triage problems, refer to several SAMS resources and the defects list to determine the nature of problem and possibly log a ticket. Depending on the issue this may take hours.
	   b. Tickets, Performance Levels, and Inefficiencies. An online system of accessing the status of logged tickets and estimated times will allow us to better risk manage an issue, e.g. an estimated resolution of 24 hours vs 1 week. Our local system meets and exceeds the requirements set by the project and we continue to have longer delays in page transitions. Although we recognize that this will improve (and has since go live) these delays transfer to the client. Interviews that may have taken 45 minutes can be doubled. This frustrates the caseworker and the client.
	   c. Employment Support. Employment supports have been directly impacted as the primary attention is on working with the client's information in SAMS and processing their benefits. We are almost completely focused on eligibility and benefits at this time. Our entire system of employment support (SAIL) is outweighed by the current needs of SAMS. The concern is the impacts of client progression, and our continued improvement in outcome measures including the real possibility of going backward.

Thunder Bay	1. Unhandled server - staff are getting this a lot in the last few days. Ticket Logged 2. Apply changes - saying to pick a row to apply when we have- Has happened often- ticket logged 3. PNA - unable to grant PNA cases- various reasons- ticket logged 4. TCA - Unable to grant TCA- various reasons-tickets logged

	5.	Arrears - wrong arrears coming off, unable to cancel a wrong cheque with the proper one amount coming off.
Kenora DSSAB	1.	Financial Reconciling with no Form 5 and no communication on how we will be complete this with year in fast approaching.
	2.	Inadequate supports and training to trouble shoot issues.
	3.	Human Resources required at all levels and departments in our organization to work on SAMs
City of Greater Sudbury	1.	Improve SAMS functionality/performance
	2.	Training needs to be established quickly - ongoing, topic related, videos, new staff
	3.	Future policy changes should be postponed until the new system is stable
	4.	That there are workload reductions established for staff as work is backlogged
	5.	Job aids/work arounds for errors are not working, need to ensure that they work and materials are clear on what needs to be done
Nipissing DSSAB	1.	Understanding whether or not a workers difficulty with completing a task in SAMS is a system errors or user error. Staff is spending hours working on files trying to get SAMS to do what it is supposed to do. This is greatly diminishing staff's level of confidence and increasing stress and frustration on the front line. Staff is also spending unreasonable amounts of time having to read through lengthy user guides and various other material that has been released since Go Live to complete even the "simplest" of tasks in SAMS.
	2.	Data conversion – the data did not convert properly from SDMT to SAMS and has caused hours of work for staff attempting to resolve these issues and merge cases. "Fixes" completed in the background by the SAMS project to resolve these issues is often creating other numerous other issues resulting in multiple tickets being logged after a fix.
	3.	Timeliness associated ticket resolution. In general. It continues to be unclear if the Ministry has the capacity to address the volume of tickets being escalated and there has been no clear communication from the project on this concern. Knowing when a ticket has been resolved has also been problematic as the information is getting lost due to the crazy number of emails floating around. We are once again working in an environment full of workarounds etc...This diminishes the effectiveness of the training that has been delivered to date.
	4.	Issues related to back end financials and reconciliation. In response to the other inquiry regarding whether or not the funding provided by the Province to support the transition to SAMS is adequate, Nipissing's response would be that the costs incurred at the local level are certainly higher than what has been provided by the Province and it is anticipated that these costs will continue well into the New Year. That being said, we would also like to highlight that while providing administrators with funding to offset the costs associated with the release of software that was clearly not ready mitigates some of funding pressures at the local level, it certainly does not fix the root cause of the problem. The bottom line is that SAMS needs to be fixed and until this happens the problems will continue to snowball as we move forward.