



Put Food in the Budget

February 14, 2011

We are members of communities who are part of the Ontario-wide Put Food in the Budget Campaign. On a day where people typically give each other chocolates and flowers, we are here because there are far too many people who cannot afford to eat a basic, healthy diet. There is nothing sweet about trying to survive on social assistance.

We are here today to deliver a message to the Minister of Finance: It is budget time in Ontario. Important decisions are being made about how money will be spent – and because of those decisions, who this government thinks is important and who it will listen to. Listen to all of us who have filled out valentines cards. Now is the time for the Minister and the government to show a genuine commitment to addressing poverty. At any time, the government could raise social assistance rates. It is urgent for the health and well-being of thousands of people in our communities. We think this budget is a good time to do it.

We want this provincial government to immediately raise social assistance rates by adding an extra \$100 Healthy Food Supplement to every single recipients OW and ODSP cheques. Social Assistance recipients in Ontario today receive approximately 40% less than they did in 1995 and live far below the poverty line. \$100 is only a first step in ensuring that people receiving social assistance can eat a healthy diet and live with dignity. We also need a clear and rational process for setting social assistance rates so that they correspond with the real costs of living.

And we are not alone in our message. The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto, the Canadian Auto Workers - Canada, Income Security Advocacy Clinic, Kingston Community Round table on Poverty Reduction, and OPSEU are among those organizations that have included the recommendation of \$100 HFS in their pre-budget submissions to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

Several municipalities are in agreement and support the implementation of the \$100 Healthy Food Supplement. They recognize this as a key investment in the lives of many of their citizens who are most vulnerable and at risk for poor health outcomes. York Region Council recently accepted and endorsed the York Region Social Audit and its recommendation - one being the implementation of the \$100 Healthy Food Supplement. We are also joined by the Health and Social Services Committee of the Regional Municipality of Durham, Social Services Administration Board of the District of Parry Sound, the Town of Wainfleet and the City of Hamilton, all of which passed motions to call on the provincial government to add a \$100 HFS.

Our Valentine's message is simple: Don't Fudge it. Put Food in the Budget. Include funds for a \$100 HFS in this budget. We don't want fudge. We don't want promises. We want immediate action.