

April 22, 2010

**Gail Nyberg
Chairperson,
Social Assistance Review Advisory Council
191 New Toronto St.
Toronto, ON
M8V 2E7**

Dear Ms Nyberg

My name is Yvonne Kelly and I work with the York Region Food Network. I am also the current Chair of the York Region Do the Math Working Group which formed in June of last year to advocate for the needs of individuals on social assistance in our region and across the province. Tom Pearson of the Poverty Action for Change Coalition (PACC) in York Region, also with the Do the Math Working Group, and myself, are active members of the Put Food in the Budget Campaign Coordinating Committee at the provincial level.

From July until December 2009 we met with 6 out of 7 of our MPPs across York Region to complete the Do the Math Survey Tool and discuss with them the implications for individuals living on social assistance levels that were inadequate even to meet basic needs of food and shelter. Here are what three of our MPPs in York Region had to say during our meetings with them and/or upon completion of the survey.

“Given it has been demonstrated that \$215 is the amount required to eat healthily by the Healthy Food Basket research, there has to be a way to make this available to everyone.”
Dr. Helena Jaczek, Liberal MPP for Oakridges-Markham (former Medical Officer of Health for York Region)

“I would be supportive of increasing the monthly benefits to a level that would allow people to afford food and shelter.”
Frank Klees, PC MPP for Newmarket Aurora

“The real issue overall is the resources that individuals and families require to meet all their basic living necessities, not just healthy food. It is important to communicate to the majority of the working public that the quality of society and their own lives will improve if we improve the conditions of the most vulnerable among us.”
Greg Sorbara, Liberal MPP for Vaughan and former Finance Minister.

This week in York Region we also held our first **Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) Social Audit**. We heard the stories of 24 individuals living in poverty from across the region and are even more convinced than ever that something has to be done immediately to address the critical situations that an increasing number of our community members are living in. To that end we continue to advocate for the immediate addition of the \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement to the Basic Needs Allowance of all OW and ODSP recipients so that they can eat more healthily and thereby reduce the likelihood that they will succumb to illness.

We ask that the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council will recommend to Minister Meilleur that:

- 1.) The government add the \$100 month Healthy Food Supplement now as an immediate measure to respond to the growing crisis of hunger in our communities and...
- 2.) The Social Assistance Review Terms of Reference include a commitment to setting social assistance income support benefits at a level that meets the cost of living with health and dignity.

Given that the average monthly budget of individuals on social assistance that the majority of MPPs across Ontario arrived at upon completion of the Do the Math Survey, (an average of \$1,314/month) was well above the current rates, it is obvious that the inadequacy of the rates is well known to all. We implore the committee to take the above recommendations to the Minister and to emphasize the need for the government to take immediate action to address the urgency of need being experienced in our communities all across Ontario.

Sincerely,

Yvonne Kelly
Chair of the York Region Do the Math Working Group
Co-Convenor of the York Region Social Audit 2010

On behalf of the York Region Do the Math Working Group

York Region Food Network
Poverty Action Coalition for Change
Heart and Stroke Foundation
Trinity United Church
St. John's Crystostom Church
York Region Alliance to End Homelessness
Georgina Food Pantry
Social Planning Council of York Region
Canadian Diabetes Association
York Region Social Audit Planning Table

