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Bill 92

An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission

Mr. P. Miller

Private Member's Bill

1st Reading March 2, 2022

2nd Reading

3rd Reading

Royal Assent



EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill amends the *Ministry of Community and Social Services Act* to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission. The Commission recommends social assistance rates, and makes other recommendations about social assistance policy. The Commission consists of people with expertise relevant to the Commission's work.

**An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act
to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission**

Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

1 Section 1 of the *Ministry of Community and Social Services Act* is amended by adding the following definition:

“provincial social assistance” means basic financial assistance under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* and income support under the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997*. (“aide sociale provinciale”)

2 The Act is amended by adding the following section:

Social Assistance Research Commission

15 (1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall establish an advisory group to be known in English as the Social Assistance Research Commission and in French as Commission de recherche sur l’aide sociale.

Membership

(2) The Commission shall be composed of nine individuals appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council in accordance with this section and the regulations.

Same

(3) Each individual appointed to the Commission must have, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council,

- (a) expertise regarding socioeconomic policy and research in respect of poverty in Ontario;
- (b) expertise regarding the cost of living in Ontario communities; and
- (c) general knowledge regarding research into the economic and financial challenges faced by members of vulnerable groups living in poverty, including but not limited to the challenges faced by women, youth, members of racialized communities, individuals with disabilities, aboriginal individuals, immigrants and refugees and injured workers.

Same

(4) The Commission’s appointees must include the following:

1. At least two individuals with specific expertise in the economic and financial challenges faced by individuals living with disabilities.
2. At least one individual with specific expertise in the economic and financial challenges faced by aboriginal individuals in Ontario.
3. At least one individual who is receiving basic financial assistance under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* at the time of their appointment or who received basic financial assistance under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* within the 10 years prior to their appointment.
4. At least one individual who is receiving income support under the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997* at the time of their appointment or who received income support under the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997* within the 10 years prior to their appointment.

Chair

(5) The Minister shall appoint the Commission’s chair from among its members.

Rules

(6) Subject to any restrictions in the regulations, the Commission may make rules governing the conduct and administration of the Commission’s affairs.

Mandate

(7) The Commission shall,

- (a) define regions of Ontario on the basis of economic geography and the cost of living in different parts of Ontario; and

- (b) annually, for each region, recommend rates of provincial social assistance based on,
- (i) an analysis of the cost in that region for the basic necessities, including,
 - (A) a nutritious food basket appropriate to the individual or family,
 - (B) shelter, basing the assessment of the cost of shelter on research into local housing costs,
 - (C) basic transportation,
 - (D) basic telephone service,
 - (E) Internet access,
 - (F) clothing,
 - (G) personal needs items, including personal hygiene products,
 - (H) household cleaning supplies,
 - (I) items and services relating to the educational and recreational needs of children, and
 - (J) any other expenses that the Commission considers basic necessities,
 - (ii) an analysis of additional expenses that may be incurred by individuals living with disabilities in order for them to participate fully in society, including but not limited to expenses related to education, transportation, over-the-counter medical goods, entertainment, clothing, making necessary modifications to a rental unit in order to accommodate a disability or renting a unit that is modified to accommodate a disability,
 - (iii) an analysis of additional expenses that may be incurred by recipients of benefits under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* who face long-term barriers to employment, and
 - (iv) other statutory benefits for which recipients of provincial social assistance are eligible.

Same

(8) The Commission may recommend additional periodic benefits for recipients mentioned in subclause (7) (b) (iii), including recommending additional monthly benefits.

Same

(9) The Commission shall, from time to time or as directed by the Minister, but no less frequently than every five years, recommend policy with respect to,

- (a) how provincial social assistance interacts with precarious employment in Ontario communities;
- (b) how to treat child support payments received by those who are also receiving provincial social assistance, with the objective of ensuring the best interests of the children affected; and
- (c) the interaction of provincial social assistance with benefits under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997*, with the objective of ensuring that recipients of provincial social assistance who have suffered a workplace injury receive appropriate benefits under the appropriate program.

Same

(10) The Commission shall report on or provide information about adequate standards of living as directed by the Minister.

Annual report

(11) The Commission shall give its recommendations under subsections (7) and (8) to the Minister in an annual report.

Additional reports

(12) The Commission shall give its recommendations, reports or information under subsections (9) and (10) to the Minister either in the annual report or in additional reports.

Publication

(13) The Minister shall make the annual report and any additional report available to the public no later than 30 days after receiving it.

Response

(14) The Minister shall prepare a written response to the recommendations in the annual report and shall make the written response available to the public within 60 days after receiving the annual report.

3 Section 17 of the Act is amended by adding the following clause:

- (d) governing the Social Assistance Research Commission, including the appointment of members, their terms of office, their remuneration, the selection of vice-chairs, the filling of vacancies and the retention of experts.

Commencement

4 This Act comes into force six months after the day it receives Royal Assent.

Short title

5 The short title of this Act is the *Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), 2022*.