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Monday 20 April 2009

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Lundi 20 avril 2009

**Standing Committee on
Social Policy**

Poverty Reduction Act, 2009

**Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Loi de 2009 sur la réduction
de la pauvreté

Chair: Shafiq Qadri
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Shafiq Qadri
Greffier : Katch Koch

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Monday 20 April 2009

Lundi 20 avril 2009

The committee met at 1402 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Ladies and gentlemen colleagues, I welcome you to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. As you know, we're here to review Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario.

Before beginning with our presenters, I will invite one of the government members to enter the subcommittee report. Mrs. Van Bommel?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Your subcommittee on committee business met on Monday, March 30, 2009, to consider the method of proceeding on Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, and recommends the following:

(1) That the committee meet for the purpose of holding public hearings on Monday, April 20 and Tuesday, April 21, 2009, in Toronto.

(2) That the clerk of the committee, with the authority of the Chair, place an advertisement for one day about the public hearings in the Toronto Star and l'Express newspapers.

(3) The clerk of the committee post information regarding the hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the Legislative Assembly website.

(4) That interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation on Bill 152 should contact the clerk of the committee by Thursday, April 16, 2009, at noon.

(5) That the clerk of the committee provide a list of all interested presenters to the subcommittee following the deadline for requests.

(6) That the deadline for written submissions be Tuesday, April 21, 2009, at 5 p.m.

(7) That the research officer provide a background on poverty prior to the start of public hearings.

(8) That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the clerk of the committee be Thursday, April 23, 2009, at 12 noon.

(9) That clause-by-clause consideration of the bill be scheduled for Monday, April 27, 2009.

(10) That the clerk of the committee, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized prior to the adoption of the report of the subcommittee to commence making any

preliminary arrangements to facilitate the committee's proceedings.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel. Are there any questions before we adopt the subcommittee report, as read? Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. It's not a question, but it is a comment. I just want it for the record because the subcommittee is not, of course, transcribed. I continue today to be disappointed that we're only setting aside a maximum of six hours to hear from delegations, from people coming forward. We have had, as I understand, 41 deputants seeking to depute and we're only able to take 24. We're not allowed to travel. We're not hearing anyone outside of the confines of this building and of Toronto. It seems to me that a bill of this magnitude, and the pride with which the minister constantly stands in the House and talks about it, ought to be much more readily accessible to the people of Ontario.

I don't know whether it's in order to make a motion, but if it is, I would like to make a motion that we schedule at least another full day of hearings to accommodate the 17 or so people who have not been allowed to be heard.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): There's a motion on the floor to amend the subcommittee report. Do I have consent for that amendment? No, consent is denied.

Those in favour of this motion? Those opposed? The motion—

Mr. Michael Prue: To the motion? On the subcommittee motion?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Those in favour of the subcommittee motion to amend, as Mr. Prue has suggested?

Mr. Michael Prue: I thought there wasn't—
Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's not consent. Then we don't vote for it.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): It's a motion to amend the subcommittee report by adding extra days.

Mr. Michael Prue: So that's the amendment before us.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): That's the motion, yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. Thank you. Sorry, I was a little bit confused since there was no unanimous consent,

but there is a motion notwithstanding the fact there's no unanimous consent. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): So we're going to dispense with that particular issue and I would now move to—

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Fine. Could you repeat your motion for me, then?

Mr. Michael Prue: My motion is to amend the subcommittee report to have another full day of hearings in order to accommodate the 17 groups and individuals who have not been allowed to make deputations.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. You've heard the formal motion on the floor suggested by Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: On a recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I would therefore ask for a recorded vote.

Ayes

Munro, Prue.

Nays

Brownell, Dhillon, Sousa, Van Bommel.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I declare that particular motion lost. Are there any further comments on the subcommittee report?

Seeing none, we'll proceed to the first presenter. I welcome—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): All those in favour of the subcommittee report as read? Those opposed? Subcommittee report carried.

POVERTY REDUCTION ACT, 2009

LOI DE 2009 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DE LA PAUVRETÉ

Consideration of Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario / Projet de loi 152, Loi concernant une stratégie à long terme de réduction de la pauvreté en Ontario.

ONTARIO CAMPAIGN 2000

FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We will now proceed to the first presenter, Ms. Jacquie Maund, coordinator of Ontario Campaign 2000. Ms. Maund, you have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. Any time remaining will be evenly distributed amongst the parties, and I invite you to begin now.

Ms. Jacquie Maund: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jacquie Maund. I work as the coordinator of Ontario Campaign 2000, which is a 66-partner coalition

of organizations across the province committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Ontario. Our coalition is based at a community agency called Family Service Toronto, which has been serving vulnerable and marginalized people in the Toronto area for 95 years.

Quickly, the name Campaign 2000 dates from the 1989 unanimous House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000.

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We're pleased that the government has introduced Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. We see this as an indication of the government's commitment to make progress on the stated goals of poverty reduction as reflected in the Breaking the Cycle document released last December. We believe that this bill takes an important step in seeking to ensure that poverty reduction is made a permanent part of government business and that all future Ontario governments must have in place a poverty reduction strategy with specific targets and initiatives for achieving them.

Ontario Campaign 2000 believes that all people in Ontario must have maximum opportunity to reach their full potential. So we would like to propose a number of amendments, 11 amendments, that we feel would strengthen Bill 152 and hold the present and future governments to account for developing and implementing an effective poverty reduction strategy, based on independent review and public input.

I'm going to now go through the 11 amendments that we would like to propose to strengthen and enhance this bill.

We believe that the ultimate goal of a poverty reduction strategy should indeed be to eliminate poverty. So we would like to see the preamble to this bill reflect those words, reflect that the vision is of a poverty-free province.

Similarly, we believe that in this framework legislation, it should reflect the long-term goal of "poverty free." For example, in section 2(1) of the bill, we suggest that it be amended to read—and I'll just summarize: The government of Ontario shall maintain the long-term poverty reduction strategy set out in Breaking the Cycle ... published on December 4, 2008, or another long-term poverty reduction strategy that is guided by the vision of a poverty-free province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario."

So those are two areas where we would like to see the words "poverty free" enshrined both in the preamble and in the legislation.

Our third comments relates to the principles that are outlined in the bill. We like these principles; we want to add to them a little, but we would also like to see that these principles guide both the development of every poverty reduction strategy and also all of Ontario's laws, policies and practices.

We have some wording that we suggest for section 2(2) that ensures that the "principles, and Ontario's laws,

policies and practices will be consistent with the same principles....”

Fourthly, continuing on the subject of the principles, we note that the bill does not reference adults living in poverty. It talks about families, children and communities, but it doesn't reference single adults. So we would like to see principle number 7 amended to reflect that. Our suggested wording for section 2(2)7 is, “That a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, adults, families and communities”—that that be added.

We'd also like to add an eighth principle that refers to human rights as a principle in reducing poverty. Specifically, we suggest that an eighth principle be added to the list and it be called “Equitable life chances and equality rights,” and that it read: “Strengthening Ontario's human rights laws and the enforcement system is essential to the reduction of poverty.”

Our sixth amendment relates to the poverty indicators that are outlined to be included in the strategy. We would like to see a greater description of poverty indicators that makes them more robust for future governments. So our suggested wording, for section 2(3)3, is: “Indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty, including but not limited to income, education, health, housing and standard of living, to measure the success of the strategy”—so a bit more fleshing out of what those very crucial poverty indicators are on which the strategy will be measured and tested.

Moving now to the seventh amendment, we'd like to make a comment on the target of future poverty reduction strategies. We believe that each time the new poverty reduction strategy is developed, the target should indeed reflect the aim of a poverty-free Ontario. So it should be making substantive progress toward that target. Our suggestion, then, for section 3, which talks about the target, is that a clause be added so that it reads: “The target shall represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years.”

Our eighth suggestion relates to the annual report on poverty reduction. We're suggesting that it should not just be posted on the website, as currently appears in the bill, but that it should be tabled in the Legislature within 60 days of completion in order to ensure public debate, public discussion and public awareness of the very important annual report on how we're doing in achieving the goals of poverty reduction set out in the strategy.

Our ninth suggestion for an amendment is around the review of the poverty reduction strategy. We would like to see an independent review of the poverty reduction strategy happen at least every five years—not the minister doing the review, but an independent body that would be appointed by the Legislature. This follows on some of our research as to what happens in the European Union, where independent experts conduct peer reviews of each country's national action plan for poverty reduction and social inclusion.

We would also like to see some more firm timelines around the review of the poverty reduction strategy and the tabling of that review in the Legislature. I'm just

going to read out those suggested amendments to section 6(1): “At least every five years, the appointed independent body shall review the long-term poverty reduction strategy then in effect.”

These are new:

“(a) The review shall begin within four years of the issuing of the poverty reduction strategy in the Legislature.

“(b) The review shall take no longer than six months.

“(c) The report of the review shall be tabled in the Legislature within two months of the completion of the review”—so some tightening up of who does the review, the timelines around doing that review and the tabling of that in the Legislature, again, to engender public discussion of this very important review.

Our 10th suggested amendment is that the independent body doing that review consult with the public, in particular, low-income people.

Our 11th suggested amendment is to ensure that the new poverty reduction strategy that is developed be based on the findings of that independent review and be tabled in a timely fashion. We're suggesting within four months of the tabling of the review of the report.

Those are our suggested amendments. We believe that this bill is historic. It's the first time that the Ontario government has introduced legislation that turns political promises on poverty reduction into provincial law, but we urge the Standing Committee on Social Policy to recommend these changes, which we believe strengthen it, to ensure that this and future Ontario governments develop and implement effective strategies that do indeed move us towards a poverty-free Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Maund. We'll move to questions, now that we have our procedural matters in hand. We have about 90 seconds per side, beginning with Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you for being here today. I want to just ask you to comment a little bit on the question of your recommendations nine and 10, and the question, then, of the independent review. How would you envisage that? What would it look like, that independent review? I appreciate the steps by which it is made public; I just want you to talk about the review itself.

Ms. Jacquie Maund: We're suggesting that someone be appointed, possibly an officer of the Legislature, who would conduct the review, clearly in consultation with interested stakeholders. He or she would require some funding to do that, to hold consultations, and we would like to see those be held around the province, not only in Toronto, so that people have an opportunity to provide comment, to provide input and then, of course, that there be a timeline around that review and that the document be public and then be tabled in the Legislature for public discussion.

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Mrs. Julia Munro: Do I have another question?
Interjection.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Munro. Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: My question relates to the government's bill. I have said many times in the House, and I'd just like your comment, that I'm not satisfied that a government bill that deals only with child poverty is going to effectively change poverty in Ontario, particularly since 85% of all people on ODSP have no children. They will be forever neglected under this bill. You said something similar to that yesterday, and you've added the inclusion of other people: the disabled, First Nations communities, new immigrants. What does this bill need in order that it is inclusive of all people?

Ms. Jacquie Maund: We've suggested upfront that it state clearly that we're seeking a poverty-free Ontario, which implies poverty-free for everyone. We've also called for the specific addition of the word "adults" so that it applies not just to children and families and communities but to adults. By referencing the Human Rights Code, we're suggesting that reflects the fact that poverty affects different groups in different ways and that particular groups are at a higher risk of poverty. By strengthening its connection to the Human Rights Code, that also moves it further in terms of a broader application.

Mr. Michael Prue: In the absence of your—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. I'll now offer it to the government side. Mrs. Van Bommel?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: On number 11, your recommendation is that the future strategies would be based on the findings of the independent review. Are you concerned at all that if it's geared strictly to that independent review that it limits the ability of the government to maybe look at other possibilities or take into account information or economic situations they may see on the horizon or any of these kinds of things?

Ms. Jacquie Maund: Sure. I think what we're saying is that the independent review hopefully will provide information as to where some of the strengths of the strategy were, where some of the weaknesses were, so it will provide information to inform the next poverty reduction strategy with a view to ensuring that it addresses any weaknesses that may have happened in the previous period. For example, in the United Kingdom, modifications have been made as they realize that they really need to address the question of working poor. It's developing a body of knowledge through the independent review and using that to inform the development of the next strategy.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But you're saying, basically, that such an important decision shouldn't just rest with the independent review but should be a collaboration of government and independent review and multiple parties and consultations and—

Ms. Jacquie Maund: Yes, and whatever other information becomes pertinent.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel, and thanks to you as well, Ms. Maund, for your presentation and written deputation on behalf of Family Service Toronto and Ontario Campaign 2000.

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now move directly to our next presenter, Grand Chief Randall Phillips, who holds the social services portfolio for the Chiefs of Ontario. Welcome, Chief Phillips. As you see in the protocol, you have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. The clerk will be pleased to distribute that for you. Please be seated and please begin now.

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: Good afternoon, everybody. How are you? [Remarks in Oneida.] My name is Randall Phillips and I'm currently the elected Grand Chief of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians. I introduced myself in my native language of Oneida. It's a tradition in our culture that we introduce ourselves first before we speak in any assembly. So it's just in recognition of my own culture to do that. Thank you very much.

Since we're not on film, I'll feel free to take my glasses off so I can read my text.

My name is Randall Phillips. I am currently the Grand Chief of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians and I hold the social services portfolio for the Ontario First Nations.

The status Indian population of Ontario First Nations is the largest of any province in Canada. The Chiefs of Ontario is a secretariat which acts on behalf of the 133 First Nations communities and it bases its decisions on resolutions passed at general and special chiefs assemblies.

I would like to acknowledge this opportunity to make a presentation to this committee on the all-important topic of poverty reduction in general and Bill 152 in particular on behalf of First Nations communities.

Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy explicitly outlines that aboriginal people are one of their key groups to help regarding poverty. The section relating to aboriginal populations in Ontario, however, focuses more so on off-reserve individuals. Even if you look at the report, there are two paragraphs that are designated specifically to aboriginal people in that report.

Due to this, questions will arise of how those living within their First Nations communities will be assisted by the Ontario government's strategy of reducing poverty.

The document explicitly outlines 10 core principles that are the major targets of this strategy. It is within the "Diversity" section that aboriginal people are outlined as a major ethnic group that will benefit from this strategy. This section, however, seems to do little to address the major poverty issues affecting those living within their First Nations communities and focuses heavily on individuals living off-reserve.

For all aboriginal people, and particularly those living in First Nations communities, the percentage who have not earned a certificate, diploma or a degree is well above the non-aboriginal norm. For example, in the Sandy Lake First Nation, a remote fly-in community in northwestern Ontario, 69% of the population aged 15 and older do not have a high school certificate, diploma or degree. The

major initiatives being put forth under the “Diversity” section for aboriginal peoples includes urban aboriginal education pilot projects, Ontario aboriginal community justice programs, a community recreation activator pilot program and the Chiefs of Ontario First Nations public health project.

My purpose today is to outline procedural and substantive concerns that First Nations have with Bill 152 and the lack of First Nations inclusion in the development of Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

First Nations’ rates of poverty exceed that of Ontario’s general population and attention is greatly needed in the same target areas that this strategy plans on addressing. The social and economic indicators for First Nations citizens are far below the Ontario and Canadian average. These are outlined in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and many other authoritative reports and studies, such as the 2008 Auditor General’s report. First Nations experience the highest unemployment rates in this country and have few economic opportunities on reserve, compounded by underresourced programs and services.

The provincial government plans on investing approximately \$2.9 billion over the next five years in order to fully implement this strategy. The strategy, however, does not identify how on-reserve First Nations communities will be helped by these new programs or services created. This sends a very worrisome signal to the system that First Nations’ issues and concerns have somewhat dropped in importance as no investments are directed at First Nations communities within the area of Ontario.

First Nations could seek other areas within the poverty reduction strategy to help those living within their communities, such as through sections related to children and their families, women and the elderly. Statistics show that First Nations children on-reserve are disadvantaged due to many of these areas that were just mentioned, and thus their education is heavily affected.

The focus on helping communities is also a possible avenue for obtaining more assistance for First Nations as it is outlined that helping the community the child lives in will help that child succeed. Under the “Diversity” section, also known as “key groups,” the sections related to women and people with disabilities are also possible avenues that could be used to address poverty within First Nations communities. The core principle relating to co-operation should also be considered as an avenue to pursue within the poverty strategy, especially in relation to the lack of strategy to help First Nation communities directly.

Through the poverty reduction strategy, enhancements can be included that will provide First Nations with the opportunity to embark on a new relationship with Ontario, one designed for the betterment of all who live within the region.

One of the most offensive statements is the government’s reference to the fact that First Nations receive gaming revenue that can be utilized for poverty reduc-

tion. This seems to be a clear statement by the province that First Nations should utilize these resources for community programming instead of being included in provincial gaming programs or within the wider scope of the poverty reduction strategy.

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In 2005, there were 24 completed suicides within the Nishnawbe Aski Nation territory, one of the highest rates in Canada.

Poverty is the lead cause of child welfare interventions. Among seven First Nations communities in Ontario, the total First Nations population is 6,179. The Children’s Aid Society of London and Middlesex is one of three CASs primarily responsible for serving these communities. We’re talking about southwestern Ontario. Among these three CASs are Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent and London and Middlesex. Almost 5% of the First Nations population for these First Nations is represented as an open protection case. In 2001, First Nations children served at the CAS of London and Middlesex represented 14.1% of the total in-care population. That’s too many people.

Section 15 of the Charter of Rights prohibits unequal treatment under the law based on various grounds, including race. This means that the province must provide equal treatment to First Nations, regardless of the level of federal funding. Based on everyday experience, First Nations on-reserve believe that they are not receiving the same level of services as available off-reserve. It is a second-class system based on racial categorization. This makes the system vulnerable to an equality challenge under section 15.

In these circumstances, there should be due consideration for amendments on behalf of First Nations in Ontario to pass Bill 152. The Bill 152 process should permit careful consideration of the concerns of First Nations on-reserve, including a fundamental concern with unequal treatment. First Nations and Ontario should discuss positive and forward-looking amendments designed to strengthen the system as it relates to First Nations communities. This would be in the best interests of Ontario and would diminish the risk of a broad-based section 15 challenge to the legislation.

In summary, the best course is that the Bill 152 package should permit meaningful consultations with First Nations communities on-reserve to help counteract poverty. If the consultations were conducted in good faith, the inevitable result would be better legislation and a program package for First Nations and Ontario. This would be in the best interests of all and would bring forth a better relationship and understanding.

“The government’s poverty reduction strategy is guided by the vision of a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential”: While Ontario First Nations fully support and agree with this important legislation, which commits current and future governments to adhere to a poverty reduction strategy, our communities and children must have an equal opportunity to grow up in safe and healthy environments with their families, in their communities and in

their culture. No First Nations child should be taken from their family because of the family's inability to provide them with the basic necessities of life. Your support and partnership to include on-reserve First Nations communities in this strategy is essential so that we can address the devastating effects of poverty on our communities, including on their health and development.

That is my presentation. Thank you. I'll be happy to try and answer questions that you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Chief Phillips. We have about 90 seconds per side, beginning with Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: I asked the question of the last deputant and I'll ask you specifically about First Nations communities. You've been completely left out of the poverty reduction strategy. How would you propose, first of all, that children living on-reserve be included in this strategy, and secondly, is it important to include all First Nations people, no matter where they live, as being a group that is specially deserving of getting out of poverty?

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: I'll try to be really brief. With respect to the on- and off-reserve programs, there's been a long discussion with respect to access to services. For our community members who live off-reserve within any urban centres, they have a better chance and better access to those services. What we're talking about now is completely devoid in terms of First Nations communities. Within that, we have a large percentage of people who are currently on social assistance who wouldn't receive any assistance at all because of the other restrictions and rules. So there has to be a separate approach with respect to including First Nations communities directly.

We talk about a rule in terms of consultation of programs affecting us. Currently in Ontario, there's a cost-sharing program called the 1965 welfare agreement. Within that agreement, it calls for any program changes to have the consent of First Nations communities before those changes go through. We think this is a significant change and an impact on that particular agreement, and we should have been advised and consulted accordingly, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thanks for your precision-timed remarks, Chief Phillips. We'll now move to the Liberal side. Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you, and welcome, Chief Phillips.

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Certainly, in your presentation here, you say that the concerns, and the need for aboriginal communities to be addressed—you do say that they are, but your concern is more about the off-reserve versus the on-reserve consultations. This bill is about the future of poverty strategies within the province and it basically sets up a mandate for future governments to always develop a strategy and address it at least every five years.

Am I to understand that your concern would be that you want to see as much consultation with on-reserve as

you might feel was done with off-reserve? You feel that there wasn't the consultation done on-reserve that should have been and you want to make sure that happens in future?

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: I would suggest both, Mr. Chair; both things have occurred. There seems to be an easy path for organizations that represent First Nations people within urban centres to get access to government people or programs and services and things like this. What we're talking about here is the duty to consult, and the duty to consult rests with the government and includes First Nations communities. There was a total absence of that. Although there might have been some comments—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I'll need to intervene there, Mr. Phillips. To Mrs. Munro, please.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you, and maybe I can give you the chance to finish the sentence there, because my concern was the discrepancy that you had outlined earlier here between on- and off-reserve. Perhaps you could just finish what you were explaining to us.

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: Yes, ma'am, thank you.

There was no concerted effort with respect to addressing any of this strategy, any of these discussions in terms of how it was going to deal with and potentially impact and benefit First Nations communities. That's what we've been saying for many, many years, that within our First Nations governance structures, we have an idea and a sense in terms of how to address these issues, how to look at them and how to really deal with them in a serious way to benefit our people. But it's an example like this where we've just been totally ignored with respect to how does the strategy move forward and how we are included.

So, yes, it is an insult with respect to First Nations communities. It is my task as the chair of the chiefs committee on social and child welfare to address these matters with people like yourself who make these decisions. There is an impact with us. We're trying to say that we need to be involved. We're trying to say that we can form solutions and work together on this. That has not occurred, and I think that's the message that I'm trying to bring here right now: Without our inclusion, there are going to be some serious challenges with respect to how we move this bill forward and some serious challenges with respect to the intent of the bill.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Munro, and thanks to you, Grand Chief Phillips, for your presentation and written deputation.

Grand Chief Randall Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO
HEALTH CENTRES / ASSOCIATION
DES CENTRES DE SANTÉ DE L'ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I will now respectfully call our next presenter, Ms. McKenna, manager of

policy and government relations for the Association of Ontario Health Centres.

You've seen the protocol, Ms. McKenna. You have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. I invite you to begin now.

Ms. Lee McKenna: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to address this important topic.

The Association of Ontario Health Centres is a member of the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction, a multi-sectoral organization comprised of more than 457 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and over 1,000 individuals working on eliminating poverty. For that reason, I will attempt not to repeat much of what you'll be hearing from my 25 in 5 colleagues.

L'ACSO est l'association provinciale représentant les centres de santé communautaire et les centres autochtones d'accès aux soins de santé de la province. Nos centres ont pour mandat de servir les Ontariens et les Ontariennes confrontés à des obstacles à l'accès aux soins de santé et sont financés à cette fin.

Nos fournisseurs travaillent selon une approche globale axée sur les déterminants sociaux de la santé. Travaillant à l'intersection de la pauvreté et de la santé, ils voient chaque jour l'incidence du faible revenu, et de tous les déterminants sociaux qui contribuent à la pauvreté, y compris le logement, le statut, l'éducation, la sécurité alimentaire, l'emploi, l'inclusion sociale, la justice sociale, l'équité et la paix, sur la santé des plus vulnérables.

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Comme nous le montre notre travail au quotidien, la pauvreté n'a pas à être un état permanent. Nos centres font une différence, et grâce à la stratégie du gouvernement et à ses nouvelles dispositions législatives, nous pourrions en faire davantage.

AOHC welcomes the introduction of Bill 152 because it presents an historic watershed in this province: recognizing in legislation, for the first time, the principle that public policy is a tool—perhaps, we might say, the key tool—in reducing and eliminating poverty in this province. If this is so, then public policy has also, in the past, been a tool of poverty creation. Bill 152 represents an important moment for government and non-governmental organizations to work in partnership for a common goal that will now be enshrined in legislation.

We recognize the essential limitations of legislation. Our legislative history is replete with examples of legislation that has been ignored, contradicted or set aside, excused as unenforceable. We recognize the danger of Bill 152 facing a similar fate—a piece of laudable rhetoric; an expression of hopes, but not intentions—which is why we are here today: to make sure that does not happen. We will be taking our role in this partnership very seriously, and we look forward to the government doing the same.

For too long, Ontarians saw annual increases in our health care budget, even as social services and supports of all kinds were being decimated around us, creating poor people, poor families, and thus sick people, families

and communities. If we are to ever see Tommy Douglas's second stage of medicare that keeps people well in the first place, rather than just patching them up when they're sick, poverty must be our priority. A poverty-free Ontario will be a healthy Ontario.

In the months leading up to and since the release of the government's poverty reduction strategy, Minister Matthews and other members of the all-cabinet committee have echoed what you have been hearing from us for years: Poverty is a blight on the landscape of this wealthy province and something can and should be done about it. It is the right investment, the best investment; an economic downturn makes it even more so. We are not here to reiterate those principles and the evidence that supports them, but to put forward specific proposals to strengthen Bill 152 so that our shared intentions for equity, inclusion, transparency and accountability are embedded in the legislation.

Though we have indicated our discontent with the limitations of these hearings, your work will benefit from the fact that in hearing from a few of us, you are hearing from many of us. You will hear echoes and reaffirmations of a dozen or so recommendations for changes to the legislation. Know that these recommendations result from many hours and days of consultations with legal and legislative experts, as well as with those whose expertise arises out of the lived experience of poverty, represented by and manifested in the work of hundreds of organizations who touch and are touched by Ontarians living in poverty every day. All of these words are grounded in the hopes and dreams of our neighbours.

A strengthened Bill 152 would lift its vision from mere reduction to at least match that of Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec, whose counterpart strategies are about elimination in the case of the former, and poverty-free in the case of Quebec. In so doing, we join worldwide movements that call us to make poverty history or to end poverty now. Other jurisdictions beyond our borders have also committed to plans that contemplate a society without poverty and its inherent obstacles to economic, social and human dignity and development.

While the poverty reduction strategy speaks to the importance of measuring progress with specific indicators, and Bill 152 refers to targets, the legislation currently lacks the teeth necessary to ensure that those targets are sufficiently substantive.

Poor children, as we know, live in poor families. While one might recognize the need to start somewhere, the exclusion of adults from the government's poverty reduction strategy assumes that children and their adult caregivers living in poverty can somehow be separated out. The focus on children also plays into the ancient divisions between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Support for children enables a skirting of a difficult discussion about a lingering discrimination. An inclusion of adults in the larger vision of poverty reduction and in this legislation is necessary.

A vision of a poverty-free Ontario is untenable without an intentional and ongoing interministerial collabor-

ation that views all new initiatives, policy and legislative, through the lens of poverty reduction. The all-cabinet committee would do well to institutionalize itself as a mechanism for dismantling silos across ministries so that poverty eradication is not isolated in a corner of the government's work but is being informed and shaped at every step.

The poverty reduction lens is essentially one of equity, equality and fairness, and thus draws us into a discussion of rights, those rights that are ours as articulated in the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and reaffirmed in this province's Human Rights Code. Times of economic crisis must not be used to deny rights that belong to all of us by virtue of our shared humanity.

Accountability is key to our common goal to reduce and eliminate poverty in this province. Reporting must be regular, its processes transparent and accessible. Consultation must be real so that your partners in this project, people living in poverty and organizations who are their voices, can see that their input has been taken seriously. This means reporting that is timely. It also means review and mechanisms of evaluation that are meaningful across the social determinants of health. Indicators must include income, education, health, housing and standard of living, amongst others, if we are to get an accurate measurement of success, or not. Evaluation must also be timely, independent and thorough. AOHC recommends that the work of the Provincial Auditor be expanded to include an exhaustive five-year review of the strategy then in effect.

In conclusion, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, as part of the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction, believes the amendments we have suggested would make Bill 152 a more effective instrument in our shared effort to ensure that poverty reduction to the point of eradication remains the most important and best-scrutinized task and service of government for the benefit of all Ontarians. Thank you.

Le Président (M. Shafiq Qaadri): Merci, madame McKenna, pour vos remarques. Nous commençons avec les questions du gouvernement; seulement une minute, s'il vous plaît. We have about a minute per side, beginning with Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you very much, and thank you for your presentation here as well. On the second page of your presentation you talk about strengthening the bill to at least match the Newfoundland and Quebec models, but my understanding, at least of the Quebec act, is that it really sets out guidelines for a strategy and it's very short-term legislation. This particular piece of legislation is intended to create a requirement or a mandate of future governments to always address the issue of poverty, so I'm kind of confused by why you would compare the two.

Ms. Lee McKenna: On this particular point, it's very specifically about the vision of the Quebec initiative. There's no doubt there are some real distinctives in the initiatives, the strategies that they contemplate and the

areas that they prioritize. But it's about the language, so across our coalition we've agreed that lifting the vision up beyond reduction to talk about total freedom of poverty is what we're trying to get at at that point.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel. Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd like to go to the point you made on page 4 with regard to the annual reporting and the question of accountability. I'm assuming that you would be looking for a public process to create that level of accountability?

Ms. Lee McKenna: Yes.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Because it doesn't exist in the current piece.

Ms. Lee McKenna: That's right. You'll see our recommendation there. I haven't gone through and read out all of the recommendations that are there, but what we are looking for is a consultation process that is public, that is, as I say, real, where all of us are participating in it, where participation is funded and where these consultations are also taking place in various parts across the province.

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Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Munro. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: How do you see the review panel being set up? Today's Toronto Star suggested that it's not good enough that the Liberals simply appoint people they want to hear from in the review. How do you suggest it be set up?

Ms. Lee McKenna: We would certainly like to see a review panel that goes beyond simply an appointment by the government but rather an appointment that brings in stakeholders to actually bring their own appointees to the review panels, so that right from the beginning, there's a sense of independence of the review and not simply those who have been appointed by the government.

Mr. Michael Prue: Who would choose them? Who would choose the initial set?

Ms. Lee McKenna: Well, I guess my bias is, as part of the 25 in 5 coalition of 457 organizations, that we would be invited to nominate from within our ranks those who would be best suited to participate in that review.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. Je vous remercie, madame McKenna, pour votre présentation et députation.

HAMILTON ROUNDTABLE FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now invite our next presenters, Ms. Weaver and Mr. Cooper of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. Welcome, and please be seated. As you've seen the protocol, you'll have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. You might just introduce yourselves as you're speaking

for the purposes of Hansard recording the permanent record, and I invite you to please begin now.

Ms. Liz Weaver: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Liz Weaver and I'm the director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. I've brought my colleague Tom Cooper and two of our citizen members of our roundtable, Sandy Leyland and Bill Mederos. We're circulating a package with our response to Bill 152. I'll speak partially to our response and ask Tom to also respond.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was born out of concern for our community's high poverty challenge. It came together in May 2005 to understand Hamilton's high poverty levels, to focus the community's attention on poverty and to begin to find solutions.

The table is a collaborative table of 42 members representing four sectors in our community: business, government, the voluntary sector and people who have the lived experience of poverty. We have the aspiration of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child, and the framework for change is based on five critical points of investment in the lives of children, youth and their families.

On Friday, our social planning and research council released its incomes and poverty report. The data and analysis from this report, based on 2006 census information, shows both signs of hope and signs of concern for Hamilton's fight against poverty. While the overall poverty rate in our community has dropped a couple of percentage points, we still recognize that 89,000 citizens in our community live below the low-income cut-off. That's enough to span the Skyway Bridge 10 times. If you know anything about the geography of Hamilton, the Skyway Bridge is a pretty prominent thing in our community and we could span that bridge 10 times with the number of individuals who live in poverty in our community.

In response to Bill 152, participation of thousands of Ontarians in community consultations around the collaborative tables indicates that there's been significant support for the Ontario poverty strategy. We believe that government plays a critical role in poverty reduction and alleviation. This role includes reforming the rules which keep individuals and families living in poverty, investing in the lives of children and their families, and investing in communities. Difficult economic circumstances impact the most vulnerable and marginalized more severely, and leadership and investment is a critical support and lifeline to 1.8 million Ontarians who find themselves below the poverty line.

We certainly commend the government of Ontario for bringing forward Bill 152. This is the first time in this province that a legislative initiative seeks to enshrine the need to reduce poverty in the province. The government of Ontario has taken a bold step in creating an inter-ministerial working committee focused on developing the poverty reduction strategy. We would recommend, as the previous speaker did, that this process be entrenched in Bill 152 to ensure that future governments will continue

this collaborative, cross-ministerial response to the complex issue of poverty. We know that poverty doesn't sit in one ministry. In fact, it crosses many ministries, whether it's education, housing, economic development or the Ministry of Community and Social Services. We believe that this is a way to enliven this legislation.

We also commend the government of Ontario for its declaration of principles which guide the legislation, including the importance of all Ontarians, the importance of communities, the recognition of diversity, the importance of support and involvement of families, respect, involvement, commitment and co-operation. We find these principles to breathe life not only into the Ontario poverty reduction strategy, but also into this legislation.

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction also believes that the issue of poverty requires that everybody is involved in identifying solutions. We believe that government has an important role to play, but citizens have an equally important role to play, as do communities, in developing responses to the complex problem of poverty. We would note, however, that this process which you've undertaken for these public hearings on this bill was a bit restrictive to those individuals who will be most impacted by the legislation—people living with low and limited income.

Specific poverty reduction targets: The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction believes that the most important target to consider is the elimination of poverty for all citizens and recommends that the goal be a poverty-free Ontario and that that goal be enshrined in the legislation. However, we recognize that the interim targets can be a positive factor in evaluating the success of reducing poverty. The provincial government's current five-year target to reduce child poverty by 25% aligns with the Hamilton Roundtable's focus around investing in critical points of investment in the lives of children and their families. We also recommend the inclusion of additional targets which recognize low-income sub-populations which are particularly vulnerable to high rates of poverty, including aboriginal people, single mothers, recent immigrants and visible minorities. We strongly encourage and support the poverty reduction strategy's annual progress reports.

Mr. Tom Cooper: Around initiatives to improve the lives of those living in poverty—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Pardon me, I need you to identify yourself for Hansard, please.

Mr. Tom Cooper: My apologies: Tom Cooper from the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

We are very supportive of this section of the proposed legislation. We would recommend that the initiatives designed to improve the economic and social conditions of persons and families living in poverty be publicly released by the minister on an annual basis and contain both funded investments and information about government priorities, such as reform of the rules and regulations which keep individuals, children and families living in poverty.

The province of Ontario's poverty reduction strategy identified a number of investments in children, youth and

their families living in poverty. Many of these investments are driven through a variety of provincial ministries. We recommend that a flexible funding and program delivery approach can leverage with municipal investments to create opportunities for people living in poverty.

In the minister's December 2008 report, *Breaking the Cycle*, rule changes were identified that have since provided much-needed help to families in receipt of social assistance. One such rule previously stipulated that students attending post-secondary institutions, but living with parents who were in receipt of social assistance, could not work a part-time job to offset the costs of education without having those earnings clawed back off the benefit unit's monthly cheque. The government recognized the importance of this rule change so that students can work a part-time job to help pay for what can sometimes be extraordinary costs of getting an education.

But other incongruities abound. One of these is around the temporary care assistance issue, which reveals that many grandparents and other non-custodial family members have been frustrated by rules which may disqualify them from accessing funds to help them cover some of the costs of raising children when parents are unwilling or unable to do so. Grandparents who have established a more permanent living arrangement with their grandkids, being granted custody and having demonstrated intent to raise those kids as their own, have been denied financial assistance despite the fact that if these same children were in the care of children's aid, caregivers would be receiving upwards of \$900 a month.

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Around indicators that will measure success: The legislation speaks to annual reporting on indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty to measure the success of the strategy. We believe that annual reporting around key indicators will be fundamental to the poverty reduction approach adopted by the government of Ontario. However, provincial indicators would be significantly more impactful if these indicators also included reported results for each community.

We recommend that annual reporting of the eight poverty reduction indicators from both a provincial and community focus would enable local communities to determine the success of their poverty reduction strategies at the community level, gaps in progress and priority setting, as well as determining how the community was doing relative to the provincial status.

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador has developed an extensive community-based website which supports local government, community organizations and citizens to better understand how their community is doing and to take action. This website is definitely worth a look.

Hamilton is ready for action, and we're willing to help. Hamilton is ready with a strategic plan in place through our framework for change and starting point strategies that are building successful collaborative initiatives. These have included specific investments in chil-

dren, youth and their families. Hamilton has been extremely effective in responding to community needs through flexible program delivery. The round table further encourages a flexible, community-led rollout of the Ontario poverty reduction strategy, which allows municipalities and community organizations to effectively meet local needs and priorities.

The round table's collaborative approach of engaging cross-sectoral partners is a leading-edge approach for complex issues. The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction has successfully worked across silos to bring some real results for children, youth and their families living in poverty in Hamilton. We have worked collaboratively and have achieved real results. Hamilton is well placed to respond as a pilot site for poverty-related initiatives, and we can help the government of Ontario achieve results and impacts immediately. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Cooper and to your colleagues. About a minute or so per side, beginning with Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I wanted to ask you just a couple of questions because of the brevity of time that we have available. I notice that there was very little reference made to either the consultation process or the report writing. I wondered if you had concerns around this.

As an opposition member, I've certainly identified the fact that these processes are not public and there's no list of bona fide people. I just wondered if you shared that concern.

Ms. Liz Weaver: Absolutely, we do. When the provincial government, around the Ontario poverty strategy, looked to communities for their input over the course of last summer, we actually worked with our five Hamilton-area MPPs and held a community consultation which involved more than 200 of our citizens around the poverty reduction strategy. We believe that any type of consultative process should include people with lived experience as well as individuals from communities representing all of the sectors.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): With regret, I will need to intervene there. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: You talked about a couple of government initiatives where they've ended or partially ended the clawbacks for students and grandparents. You didn't say anything about the clawbacks to the disabled, which continue unabated. Any discussion, any comments you might have on that? Fifty per cent of everything they earn is taken off them.

Mr. Tom Cooper: Certainly it's an issue that remains a concern. In Hamilton, many of our low-income members of the round table and other community initiatives were extremely vociferous in terms of appealing the issue around post-secondary earnings issues. As you're well aware, we've had a collaborative approach in dealing with the temporary care assistance issue, working with our local member as well as other advocacy groups in the community, including Raising our Children's Kids, the ROCK group. But there remain numerous issues and, as

we mentioned, incongruities in terms of looking at policies that do tend to keep individuals living in poverty. So we are very interested in working across lines to try to come up with workable solutions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: On your last page, you talk about indicators being done at the community level. I'm just kind of curious: Who would do that, and how would they do that in smaller communities and rural communities like my constituency, where we don't necessarily have the human resources to do that kind of thing, or it would add to the workload of people there?

Ms. Liz Weaver: In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, government takes the lead and works with a collaborative group to post all that information online. Certainly, that has really informed communities across Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it's a rural community or a larger municipality, and we look upon that as kind of a best practice model. So if the government has identified eight indicators and you are tracking that at a provincial level, if we knew how Hamilton was doing relative to those similar eight indicators, that would certainly help focus our work at the municipal level, in terms of graduation rates, EQAO results and the low-income measure.

What we're saying is, could government take the lead on that and provide a web-based resource so that all municipalities across Ontario would be able to see where they are, relative to the indicators that—

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So this would be more of a resource for municipalities—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel, and thanks to you, Ms. Weaver and Mr. Cooper, and to your colleagues on behalf of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, both for your presence as well as your written deputation.

INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CENTRE FOR THE 25 IN 5: NETWORK FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I invite now our next presenters, Ms. Marrone and Ms. Blackstock, of the Income Security Advocacy Centre for the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction.

Welcome. You've seen the protocol. You've got 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. I'd invite you to please begin now.

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Blackstock, and I am the research and policy analyst with the Income Security Advocacy Centre. We're a provincial legal clinic focused on poverty issues. With me is Mary Marrone, who is the director of advocacy and legal services at ISAC. We are part of the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction, which has already been introduced to you.

Bill 152 is undoubtedly a very important piece of legislation, because it commits Ontario to working on an

ongoing basis to reduce poverty. It's a good piece of legislation, but it can and must be improved so that Ontario has the bold, carefully crafted, thoroughly evaluated and widely debated poverty reduction strategies we need to build the province we want.

25 in 5 is recommending a number of amendments that we believe will strengthen this legislation. The specific amendments have been provided in the written submission, and I'll just address a few of them this afternoon.

Firstly, like my colleagues before me, we agree that this legislation must commit Ontario to being a leading jurisdiction in the drive to reduce poverty. As part of such a commitment, the legislation should be amended to acknowledge that the ultimate goal of poverty reduction strategies is to eliminate poverty. What is the point of this work, I ask you, if it's not to create a poverty-free Ontario?

If the purpose of poverty reduction strategies is to make substantial, ongoing progress toward eradicating poverty, then the legislation must keep us moving forward in bold, ambitious and realistic ways. Toward this, 25 in 5 recommends that section 3 be amended to clarify that when new targets are established, they must represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years and the targets must ultimately address all poverty in Ontario.

While the current poverty reduction strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, only, and in our view erroneously, focuses on children, Ontario's efforts to reduce poverty must include combatting adult poverty, and so 25 in 5 is seeking an amendment to recognize the need to address adult poverty.

25 in 5 also believes that if poverty reduction is going to be taken seriously, the work of poverty reduction and the principles that direct it need to be incorporated into all public policy. As has been said before, poverty is as much the work of the Ministries of Education, Health and Labour, for example, as it is the work of the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Indeed, it's only when the work of ministries is integrated and the poverty reduction lens is widely applied that Ontario will have the public policy we need to reduce and ultimately eradicate poverty. Therefore, 25 in 5 is recommending an amendment that would commit all of Ontario's laws, policies and practices to be consistent with the principles outlined in this strategy.

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That said, 25 in 5 is seeking an amendment which would add an additional principle. Inequality contributes to poverty. Poverty contributes to inequality. Legislation requiring successive governments to continue the critical work of poverty reduction must concurrently express their institutional commitment to equitable life chances for all Ontarians, as well as the protection and enhancement of human rights. Therefore, 25 in 5 recommends that an additional principle be added, which reads, "Strengthening Ontario's human rights laws and the enforcement system is essential to the reduction of poverty."

The historic significance of Bill 152 should not be understated. Finally Ontario will have meaningful, measurable plans to reduce poverty. The public, as well as the opposition parties, must have ample opportunity to consider and contribute to Ontario's poverty reduction strategies. This is what will ensure that the strategies are strong and resilient. So 25 in 5 is recommending that the legislation be amended to require annual reports to be tabled in the Legislature.

Similarly, to ensure that Ontario's poverty reduction strategies are robust in their evaluation and recommendations, and are done in a timely manner, 25 in 5 is recommending that an independent body be appointed to conduct the reviews, and more specific timelines be put in place regarding the five-year review.

In conclusion, the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction believes that the amendments we have suggested this afternoon and the ones elaborated on in our written submission would make Bill 152 a more effective instrument in our shared effort to ensure that poverty reduction remains the permanent business, not only of government, but of the people of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thanks very much. We have about three minutes per side, beginning with Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Most of the poverty consultations that led up to the bill were by invitation only. It was very difficult for some groups, and people living in poverty, to get in. How are you proposing that the poverty discussions following the bill would be set up so that it isn't just people appointed by the government telling them what a good job they're doing?

Ms. Mary Marrone: Are you talking about the consultations at the end of the review period?

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes. There's going to be an independent review. Often, what happens at the end is that the government invites people in who are friendly to them, to say what a good job they've done, and then they parade that report around. How can we get something that is a little bit more independent and a little bit less biased?

Ms. Mary Marrone: I think you start by appointing an independent body. Precisely how that's done—there are a number of options. There's the Public Appointments Secretariat; the minister could appoint. But it needs to be somebody who has the confidence of the low-income community and the people of Ontario.

What we've suggested, by way of amendments, is timelines and the need for consultation. I think the consultation process needs to be open. What is critical is that it's an opportunity to do a constructive but critical review of the successes and failures of the first poverty reduction strategy. For this to continue to be meaningful, we have to be clear on what worked and what didn't work. Transparency is going to be key to that happening in a meaningful and productive way.

Mr. Michael Prue: Other jurisdictions in Europe and Quebec certainly have a much more independent review. Are you seeing something along those lines?

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: Yes, something that is completely arm's-length from the government. We believe strongly that to get the evaluation we need to build stronger strategies, we need to have that independence. There are models in Europe that we can look to; the EU has done very interesting work. The key is independence.

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister said something today that I thought bordered on the bizarre, stating that this law makes Ontario the leading jurisdiction on poverty in the world. Would you share that view?

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: At this point, no. However, we could be. It's exciting that we have an opportunity in this process for these amendments to be taken seriously. Even in the few presentations that I've heard this afternoon, there's a great amount of consensus about what we need to strengthen this legislation. So let's become the leading jurisdiction in the world.

Ms. Mary Marrone: I think the one amendment that could put us in the lead is adding the piece about principles guiding all legislation policy and practice, because then you get beyond just this poverty reduction strategy and the next one five years down the road. That takes you to specific policy initiatives that come out of the strategy. Imagine what a social assistance program would look like that would have to respect these excellent principles that have been set out in this act, but at this point only apply to the strategy itself. We'd like to see them applied to any legislation, whether it's housing, whether it's social assistance, whether it's education, to ensure that the differential impact on—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you. We'll now move to the government side. Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We move very quickly here, don't we?

I just want to pursue a little bit further what Mr. Prue started talking about, which is who's setting standards and who's going well beyond. Would you not agree that this is the first legislation anywhere that actually mandates that there be a strategy developed every five years?

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: I don't know the answer to that question. It could well be, but the point remains that to be a leading jurisdiction, there are things that can be done to amend the legislation. But in terms of acknowledging that, I can't answer that question. I know in Europe, for instance, they update their policies on a regular basis.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But do you know if that is mandated within law?

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: I don't know. I don't think so.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: You talked about the fact that you felt it was erroneous for the first strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, to be focused on children. I think you would both agree that poverty should not be inevitable. I'm just wondering, as a first strategy and as a first target, do you think that it should have been different? Could you suggest what it should have been?

Ms. Mary Marrone: I think there are a number of disadvantaged communities that include highly disadvan-

taged adults, and leaving adults out of the conversation is a huge omission. As was raised earlier, people with disabilities should not be left behind. That was a constituency that was very disappointed with the poverty reduction strategy. We can't lose sight of the fact that children live with adults, and there are adults without children who live in poverty. Single people without children are among the poorest in the province.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I don't think anyone disagrees with that, but I think as a starting point, as a first target, you have to make a decision as to where you would start to move on the whole issue of poverty reduction. I'm just curious as to why you thought that starting with children was an erroneous thing to do.

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: The 25 in 5 Network has always been clear that we think all poverty needs to be addressed. When we set that target, we were very clear in talking about child and adult poverty, for precisely the reason that Mary mentioned: Children live with adults. The best way to combat poverty is with an integrated strategy that acknowledges that—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you. To Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I have two questions I'd like to ask. In recommendation 6, you say, "Strengthening Ontario's human rights laws and the enforcement system is essential to the reduction of poverty." I think you've combined two fairly complex things there. I just wonder, first of all, if you'd comment on strengthening the human rights laws and then this reference to an enforcement system.

Ms. Mary Marrone: I think the reference there is, this is the mirror side of the recognition of the principle of diversity and disadvantage, and in order to combat that, equality is critical. I think we're primarily talking about the enforcement of the current Human Rights Code and the strengthening of the tribunal, the strengthening of the human rights centre, to make sure that we have legislation that is enforced in this province.

1520

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you. I think that's an important clarification.

The second question I have is, do you have any concerns about establishing a base from which to measure progress? Because you do talk about the importance of that being a more transparent and public process than this legislation envisages. I just wonder, then, if you have any concerns about how you're going to establish a base from which to measure progress.

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: I'm sorry, I'm not sure I fully understand the question.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Well, in the current piece of legislation that we're looking at, there is no public mandated process. There's a report to be written and people to consult, and that's it. My question is, are you not concerned, then, about the fact that there's no base from which to then be able to look at these reports and say, "We've gone from A to B"?

Ms. Sarah Blackstock: And that's precisely why we've called for the reports to be tabled in the Leg. We

have other recommendations that specify some of the indicators that we would like to be used to measure poverty. So absolutely, those are key amendments that need to be addressed so that we can continue to build.

We also specified that we wanted an amendment that indicated that the targets have to build on one another, so that we do 25 in 5, and 50 in 10, and we get to a poverty-free Ontario.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Munro, and thanks to you, Ms. Marrone and Ms. Blackstock, on behalf of your deputation for the advocacy centre for 25 in 5.

WELLESLEY INSTITUTE

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I now invite our next presenter, Mr. Shapcott of the Wellesley Institute, to please come forward and introduce your colleagues as well. As you've seen in the protocol, you have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. I would invite you to begin it now.

Mr. Michael Shapcott: Thank you very much. We do have a written submission. My colleague Aerin Guy will introduce herself.

Ms. Aerin Guy: Hello, my name is Aerin Guy, and I'm the communications manager at the Wellesley Institute. This is my colleague Michael Shapcott, who is the Wellesley Institute's director of social innovation and affordable housing.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make these submissions in support of Bill 152, Ontario's draft anti-poverty legislation.

The Wellesley Institute is a research, policy and social innovation think tank dedicated to advancing urban health. We don't just document problems; we work with our partners to advance pragmatic and effective solutions. We are proud to be a founding partner of the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction.

We were pleased when the Ontario government announced in early December that it would build its anti-poverty plan on the solid foundation of legislation. We support Bill 152 and, along with our partners in 25 in 5, we believe that key amendments will ensure that this legislation becomes the cornerstone for a poverty-free Ontario.

You've already heard from 25 in 5. We urge the committee to adopt the 25 in 5 recommendations.

Mr. Michael Shapcott: Poverty is making Ontarians sick, and that's not just a provocative statement. It's the title of the first of a series of powerful new research studies from the Wellesley Institute and our partners at the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, and the Social Assistance in the New Economy initiative at the University of Toronto. Our research shows that the poorest Ontarians—not just children, but adults and seniors—have significantly higher rates of poor health and chronic conditions than wealthier Ontarians, as much as seven times higher. Poor people suffer higher rates of

diabetes, heart disease, chronic bronchitis, arthritis and rheumatism, mood disorders and anxiety disorders.

In fact, most distressingly, our research shows that one in 10 social assistance recipients in Ontario considered suicide in the previous year, and that suicide attempts by social assistance recipients in Ontario are 10 times higher than they are for the rest of Ontarians. In our opinion, this amounts to an indictment of our provincial income support programs when such a high number of people are being driven to poor health and absolute despair.

However, there's one other set of findings that does offer some hope. Some sophisticated, multivariate analysis by University of Toronto Professor Ernie Lightman shows that every \$1,000 increase in income leads to statistically significant and, in some cases, substantial improvements in health outcomes. The bad news is that poverty is making Ontarians sick. The good news is that increases in income have a powerful and positive impact on health.

We have a series of practical recommendations we'd like to leave with the committee today.

First, we believe that Bill 152 needs to be amended to ensure that it's rooted in principles of equity and equality. Specifically, we think that section 2.2, which is the "Principles" section of the legislation, needs to include a section that acknowledges equity and equality. We have some language in our submission. We know that the legislative lawyers will have their go at things as well and put it into their Shakespearean prose. But we think that it's very important that specifically equity, equality and fairness are acknowledged as being integral to a poverty reduction strategy.

Secondly, we're proposing that the "Principles" section be further amended to recognize the importance of the third sector: the voluntary, non-profit, charitable and community-based groups that not only are on the front lines of providing practical support to lower-income Ontarians, including the victims of the current recession, but also that it's the third sector that's providing the innovation and inspiration to build the Ontario of the 21st century. The government did acknowledge in its poverty reduction framework last December the importance of the third sector, but the draft legislation is silent on the third sector. So again, we've suggested some wording that recognizes the importance of the third sector in terms of poverty reduction strategy, and we'd commend that to the committee.

I'd like to say that last year at the Wellesley Institute, we applauded the Ontario government when it announced plans for a modest but very important \$20-million social innovation fund for the third sector. Unfortunately, the provincial finance minister put those plans on hold with his fall economic update. However, in December, in terms of the roller coaster, the fund was put back on the fast track as part of the poverty reduction framework, only to be suspended once again in the spring provincial budget.

Ms. Aerin Guy: Thirdly, we want to emphasize that the project of ending poverty is even more important

today, as the province slips deeper into economic recession, than when the government launched it more than a year ago.

However, we also want to acknowledge that there are a great many requirements for government funding. Therefore, we believe that the government needs to consider initiatives that leverage its poverty investment dollars—putting the dollars to work as effectively as possible. Specifically, we would ask this committee to recommend that the government leverage those investments that have the most impact on reducing health disparities, including enhanced primary care, integrated cross-sectoral interventions, early childhood intervention and support, and integrated hub-type community centres providing a range of services customized to greater and more complex needs of the poor.

Fourth, we want to emphasize, based on our observations of poverty reduction initiatives in other jurisdictions, that it is critical to align the legislation and principles of the province's poverty reduction plan with the provincial budget. This ensures that the budget allocations are aligned with policy decisions and prioritized strategies.

Fifth, we believe that Ontario's poverty reduction plan will only succeed as all the line ministries are fully engaged and their work is effectively coordinated.

The Ontario government has recognized this critical imperative in creating a cabinet-level committee that includes key ministers. That's a good first step. Now the government needs to effectively engage the departments and people throughout the various ministries.

Sixth, ongoing monitoring is essential to strengthening the understanding of how well public programs meet the real needs of lower-income Ontarians, and in assessing the poverty-reducing impact of public spending.

Seventh, and finally, we want to note that the Ontario government has the opportunity to put its principles into practice this spring as it launches two very important rounds of consultations on creating a comprehensive affordable housing plan and reviewing social assistance.

Housing and income assistance are critical pillars in any poverty reduction plan. The cost of housing is the single biggest expense for low-, moderate- and even middle-income households, and Ontario has the highest housing costs in Canada. Bill 152 doesn't reach down to the details of these critically important consultations, but we urge members of this committee to remain firmly engaged in specific components of the poverty elimination plan as they are brought forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to make these submissions

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thanks very much. We have about two minutes or so per side, beginning with Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you for your presentation. I just want to refer to page 3, where you talk about—and we all know that as the economy continues to go down, there are a lot more pressures and families are certainly experiencing, some for the first time, some real

issues financially and are having an experience with poverty.

You talk about hubs. My experience with hubs has always been more for childhood education and early childhood interventions. Can you describe how you envision these hubs and how you would establish them in the communities, and how you would do it in remote and rural communities and that sort of thing?

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Mr. Michael Shapcott: There are excellent models, in terms of the delivery of primary health care, in terms of community health care centres, and the Ontario government is taking certain steps in this direction. We think those steps need to be encouraged.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So you would incorporate them with health care, with the family health teams?

Mr. Michael Shapcott: Incorporating them into community health centres, multidisciplinary health practices—so, delivering primary care services plus a range of other services and programs. Again, there are some specific examples of that.

On your question of how to ensure that they reach out across the geography, that is a critical issue outside of the urban areas, in particular. There are some mobile responses that can actually help to get services and programs to where people are. We also know that there are specific programs that have been modestly used within health: health ambassadors, for instance, who help to bring health care services and programs directly to people.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: You talk about incorporating them. I'm glad to hear you talk about them in terms of existing things such as health care centres, because I know that in rural communities—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): With apologies, Mrs. Van Bommel, I will intervene. Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I have a couple of questions. When the government first announced the \$20-million social innovation fund, were you privy to any kind of details or any suggestion of the direction that money might take?

Mr. Michael Shapcott: No.

Mrs. Julia Munro: In your presentation you said, "It is critical to align the legislation and principles of the province's poverty reduction plan with the provincial budget." Is that on the assumption that any reporting would be in the public domain?

Mr. Michael Shapcott: We do think there needs to be reporting in the public domain and through a variety of mechanisms. We know that there is increasing use in a number of political jurisdictions of various public auditing processes as a way of determining. For instance, a few weeks ago in British Columbia, the provincial auditor released a very detailed audit of provincial housing and homelessness programs which was extremely useful. It tracked dollars, but it also tracked the effectiveness of the services and programs in reaching people.

Mrs. Julia Munro: So you would certainly support any motion that would have this reporting public—

Mr. Michael Shapcott: It should be entirely public, yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: You talk about equity and equality here. The statistics that I've seen on poverty increasingly show that the face of poverty is new immigrants, First Nations, people of colour, the disabled. How do you propose that the government attack that issue? They've left it out of this poverty consultation to date.

Mr. Michael Shapcott: Our recommendation is, first of all, to enshrine in legislation itself that equity and equality need to be a central principle of legislation. We think the legislation itself needs to be amended to include that.

You'll be hearing shortly, I think, from the Colour of Poverty organization. They'll be giving some specific recommendations.

I will say that our research does in fact show that issues of health, issues of poverty and issues of equality definitely have a colour to them. We do work, for instance, in a downtown Toronto neighbourhood you're familiar with, St. James Town, where there is a large number of what used to be called visible minorities, but what are now the visible majority, where people are suffering extreme rates of poverty, far out of proportion in terms of their relative weight in the population.

So we do think these issues have to be addressed, but our recommendation is, first of all, that it has to start with the legislation itself, as one of the governing principles of the legislation, and then that has to be incorporated into the measurements, and it has to be incorporated into the targets of the program, and ultimately into the funding and the various details of the poverty elimination plans.

Mr. Michael Prue: You talk about the government having two comprehensive affordable housing plans and of reviewing social assistance in the future. Would it not have been better for the government to have put those plans on the table before this bill was put to committee so that we would know really where the government was going?

Mr. Michael Shapcott: Well, Ontario of course used to have a reasonably comprehensive affordable housing program, but that was dismantled starting in 1995. So now it's a process of starting to rebuild that—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue, and thanks to you, Mr. Shapcott and Ms. Guy, for your deputation on behalf of the Wellesley Institute and for abiding by the rigorous enforcement of the time management.

SOCIAL PLANNING NETWORK OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now invite our next presenters, Ms. Vaughan and Mr. Novick, for the Social Planning Network of Ontario. You've seen the protocol. You have 15 minutes, the same 15 minutes, in which to make your presentation, and I'd invite you to begin now.

Ms. Tracey Vaughan: My name is Tracey Vaughan. I'm the executive director for Community Development Council Durham and a board member of the Social Planning Network of Ontario.

The Social Planning Network of Ontario is pleased to have this opportunity to present its views on Bill 152 to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. The SPNO is made up of 20 local social planning and community development councils across the province. All are independent, community-based organizations that are dedicated to the social and economic well-being of their communities. Since February 2008, the SPNO has worked with community leadership in more than 25 communities across Ontario to promote the 25 in 5 declaration on poverty reduction and specific policies and programs that are required in a serious poverty reduction strategy for Ontario.

The SPNO wishes to express its clear support for the recommendations for amendment of Bill 152 presented in the submission of the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction. We also wish to make some additional suggestions for strengthening Bill 152.

The SPNO strongly supports the 25 in 5 recommendation that the first paragraph of the preamble be amended to refer to the vision of a poverty-free province. Notably, as early as 2002 the Quebec government set a strong target and clear timelines in article 4 of its own anti-poverty law: "The national strategy is intended to progressively make Quebec, by 2013, one of the industrialized nations having the least number of persons living in poverty, according to recognized methods for making international comparisons."

The SPNO further recommends that the current government commit to a stronger target for its own child poverty reduction goal by adding to the second paragraph of the preamble, "and a 50% reduction of Ontario children living in poverty within 10 years." The governments of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the United Kingdom are all committed to major reductions in poverty over 10 years, and Ontario should not hesitate to make the same commitment.

In terms of concerns about binding future governments, in that regard we would like to point out that: a five-year commitment for a 25% child poverty reduction by 2013 already extends beyond the next provincial election in 2011, and therefore presents the next Ontario government with the challenge to fulfill that commitment; and government legislation is not binding. Future governments of whatever political stripe will either honour or they will rescind the commitments to poverty reduction in the new act.

We would also like to challenge the notion of breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty as a primary initial focus. The SPNO is very concerned about the third paragraph in the preamble of Bill 152, which reads: "The initial focus of the government's strategy is on breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty by improving opportunities for children, particularly through the education system." The SPNO recommends that this paragraph

be amended as follows: "The initial focus of the government's strategy is on breaking cycles of poverty by improving economic, learning and developmental opportunities for children and families across Ontario."

This is important for the following reasons. The current language promotes the notion of an underclass. The preamble to Bill 152 risks seeding the notion in this framework legislation that poverty is the responsibility of the people who are poor. References to intergenerational poverty evoke images of an underclass.

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The convenience of the "underclass" theory, in which poverty becomes transmitted from generation to generation, is that it absolves governments from taking the action necessary to address the fundamental structural, economic and social factors that are the root causes of inequity and poverty in our society. These are not acceptable assumptions for grounding the framework legislation on poverty reduction in Ontario.

There's a lack of evidence for intergenerational poverty as a predominant concern. There is no evidence that intergenerational poverty is the predominant or primary source of poverty in Ontario.

A recent report released by the Ontario Association of Food Banks cites Canadian research that reports "fairly high rates of intergenerational income mobility; that is, a relatively small likelihood that the children of low-income Canadians will themselves experience low incomes when they grow up."

It is important that the framework legislation for poverty reduction in Ontario not suggest that the primary or predominant source of poverty is passed from one generation to the next.

Addressing major structural conditions that determine life opportunities: Given the preceding, the preamble to Bill 152 should assert the need for breaking cycles of poverty that lie in structural factors which deny access to adequate and decent living conditions for individuals and families in Ontario.

When 45% of Ontario children living in poverty are in families where at least one parent is working full-year, full-time, as Ontario Campaign 2000 reports, the problem is hardly an issue of intergenerational poverty. Rather, the barriers to escaping poverty for this shamefully high number of children and families lie in the following: inadequate income support programs; labour market conditions such as low wage levels and the lack of good jobs; inaccessibility to essential family supports, such as affordable and quality childcare; and the cost of housing.

When we situate the role of education appropriately, the government's poverty reduction strategy expects a lot of Ontario's education system with respect to poverty reduction. This is reinforced in the third paragraph of the preamble to Bill 152. Some suggest that a contributing factor to intergenerational poverty is a lack of school completion and conclude that reducing drop-out rates will lower poverty rates.

While the correlation between educational achievement and higher income levels is undeniable, it is import-

ant not to assume that the lack of school completion is an inherent characteristic of low-income families. When we look at Duncan's work, they concluded from their study of school completion and family incomes in the late 1990s the following: "These analyses suggest that economic conditions in early childhood have the biggest impact on achievement, especially among children in families with low incomes. Estimates from sibling models support the hypothesis that economic conditions in early childhood are important determinants of completed schooling."

The Quebec anti-poverty law actually frames the role of the education system as primarily preventive in subsection 8(3). Further, it affirms the role of other developmental supports, such as culture, recreation and sports in addressing poverty. Bill 152 should similarly acknowledge this area, at least in the preamble, which is why SPNO recommends that in addition to improving economic conditions to break cycles of poverty, that paragraph 3 also refer to improving "learning and developmental opportunities for children and families across Ontario."

When we look at addressing the reduction of adult poverty in Ontario, the SPNO recommends the addition of a fourth paragraph to the preamble to Bill 152 as follows: "A continuing objective of the government strategy is to reduce levels and depths of poverty for all adults across Ontario." It is important for the government to express its own clear commitment to substantive poverty reduction for all Ontarians beyond its initial focus on children and families in poverty.

The SPNO is particularly concerned by this omission in Bill 152 because of our outreach to communities across the province in the last 15 months. There was strong support for reducing child and family poverty, but also serious concern that the government's poverty reduction strategy would not be complete or comprehensive if it did not include commitments to low-income individuals and couples without children.

Notably, the latest report of the advisory committee to combat poverty and social exclusion in Quebec concludes that although family incomes have improved since 2002, unfortunately the same cannot be said for singles and childless couples who are on social assistance.

In conclusion, we understand that the framework legislation represented in Bill 152 must be consistent with the current government's initial plan. However, we urge that the legislation for framing a long-term provincial poverty reduction strategy for Ontario be expansive enough to allow stronger action in the future by both this government and future governments of Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We have about 90 seconds per side, beginning with Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Am I correct in assuming from your comments that you aren't satisfied that there is sufficient direction given in this legislation that would guarantee that there would be a gradual progression from looking at children to other members of our community?

Mr. Marvyn Novick: The legislation is unclear. It sets up children as deserving attention and ignores adults. Our comments are around treating everyone equally, and communities across Ontario have said they want this.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Pardon me. I need you to identify yourself as well, please.

Mr. Marvyn Novick: I'm sorry. I'm Marvyn Novick from the Social Planning Network of Ontario.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you. I just felt that it's really important for people to understand that there's a gap in the legislation that we're looking at that doesn't speak to, frankly, what I would agree with you as being an extremely important omission.

Mr. Marvyn Novick: Absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Rates of poverty amongst the disabled are shockingly high. Most disabled, we know from statistics, have no children, which ought not be a surprise to people. Therefore, any government strategy such as this that focuses just on children is going to, of necessity, bypass completely those who are probably most vulnerable. What would you suggest they do?

Mr. Peter Clutterbuck: It's true that many disabled people do not have children, but they also are experiencing higher levels of poverty. That's one of the reasons we make a specific recommendation around making sure that adult poverty is included in the preamble and in the objectives of this particular government. Specifically, we've proposed things like the \$100-a-month healthy food supplement to support all adults in terms of starting to gain the capacity to meet the basic necessities of life, in terms of rent, food and other necessities.

Mr. Michael Prue: Is this similar to the \$42 the government announced for children? You'd want to see a similar type of subsidy for the disabled for healthy food?

Mr. Peter Clutterbuck: Actually, it amounts to adding just to the basic needs allowance that already exists in OW and in ODSP for people to meet their basic living requirements. It doesn't require a new program or a new benefit. It just requires recovering the 40% that has been lost since the mid-1990s in terms of basic income for people.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): To the government side. Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: You talk about supporting the 25 in 5 recommendations, and then you go on to talk about a number of other things. They all kind of deal with the preamble, which is non-binding in terms of what we do with this legislation. Is there anything other than the recommendations from the 25 in 5 that are actually specific to the legislative piece of this bill?

Mr. Marvyn Novick: No, because the preamble is a problem. It is flawed. It stigmatizes people in poverty through intergenerational—it doesn't address adults. And it's a weak commitment—25%. In other jurisdictions, the commitment is over 10 years deeper. So we think the preamble has to get it right before you go into the legislation.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thanks to you for your deputation on behalf of the Social Planning Network of Ontario.

UJA FEDERATION
OF GREATER TORONTO
CANADIAN JEWISH CONGRESS,
ONTARIO REGION

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now invite our next presenters, Mr. Adler, Mr. Spiro and Dr. Bialystok of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region. Welcome. I would just invite you all to identify yourselves individually as you speak. Please begin now.

Mr. Stephen Adler: My name is Stephen Adler. I'm the director of public policy and governmental affairs for UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. UJA's mission is to preserve and strengthen the quality of Jewish life in greater Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Israel and around the world through philanthropic, volunteer and professional leadership.

CJC Ontario Region is the advocacy agency for the Jewish communities of Ottawa, Toronto, London, Hamilton, Windsor and those communities that are on the smaller side but do have a Jewish communal presence. We're honoured today to join you and to present to you a Jewish community perspective on the bill.

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I am joined today right by David Spiro, chair of the public affairs committee of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto; Dr. Frank Bialystok, the regional chair for the Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region; Len Rudner, who's the regional director for Ontario Region; and Melanie Simons, who is our national director of social policy at Canadian Jewish Congress.

It is our intention to provide you with a bit of a presentation and some recommendations and hopefully leave time for questions and answers. You have our packages in front of you, so if we highlight only some of the recommendations, the full list of 12 recommendations has been provided to you.

I now turn it over to David Spiro.

Mr. David Spiro: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is David Spiro and I chair the public affairs committee of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. I would like to begin by thanking the government of Ontario for its leadership in recognizing the scourge of poverty and undertaking to address it in very real terms. We know how important this legislation will be to the province as a whole and to the Jewish community in particular in our collective effort to reduce the impact of poverty.

As you may be aware, the Jewish community has a successful track record of programs and services addressing the issue of poverty. We've learned that each community has unique needs and that a one-size-fits-all approach has a low probability of success. The lessons learned over time have brought us to the realization that a

multi-dimensional and integrated approach among a number of agencies, backed by community leadership, is most effective at helping reduce the scope of poverty within the community.

The foundation of our approach to fighting poverty lies not in charity, but in human rights. It recognizes that all members of the community share an obligation to uphold those rights; after all, every individual is created in the image of G-d and is entitled to dignity, respect and equality of opportunity.

To that end, UJA Federation created a community social policy table to assist UJA and its funded agencies in dealing with social policy issues that impact Toronto. We convened this table in conjunction with CJC Ontario Region. This table, which includes members of the Jewish community with experience from across the social service spectrum, has met numerous times for the simple reason that we're profoundly concerned about the impact of poverty, within the Jewish community in particular and greater Ontario in general. Our social policy table responded to a request for province-wide input into a poverty reduction plan to be implemented by the government of Ontario, and we've jointly submitted Transforming Lives: A Comprehensive Strategy to Combat Poverty, to Minister Matthews and the cabinet committee on poverty reduction.

Over many decades, CJC and UJA Federation have fought to turn the dream of a poverty-free Ontario into a reality. Our work has helped Jewish and other minority communities realize the right to live as full citizens of Ontario. This work has strengthened our city, province and country. As the late Louis Lenkinski, a Canadian labour and volunteer leader in the Jewish community, observed, "There cannot be justice for the Jews until there is justice for everyone."

The Hebrew term Tzedakah, literally "righteousness," is a core value in the Jewish religion. Tzedakah is not limited to providing of financial support, as charity generally is, although that is an important component of Tzedakah. Maimonides, the great Jewish philosopher, considered various levels of Tzedakah. For Maimonides, the highest level is enabling an individual to gain employment and sustain himself to the point of no longer needing such assistance. This is the ideal for which we strive in our work and I'm confident that, working together, we will help to enhance our collective capacity for achieving the highest level of Tzedakah.

Dr. Frank Bialystok: Good afternoon. My name is Frank Bialystok; I'm the chair of Canadian Jewish Congress in Ontario. I'd like to provide some background on the Jewish community of Ontario for your benefit.

The Jewish community has long been on the front lines of the battle against poverty. In Ontario, over 25,000 Jews, or 11.2% of the population of 230,000, live in poverty. Furthermore, when one looks at the Toronto numbers regarding child poverty, 3,800 Jewish children under the age of 14 years live in poverty, with 33% of those being from single female-parent households.

As we discussed in the Transforming Lives document, a copy of which we have provided for you today, there is

a need for a multi-dimensional approach to the challenge of poverty. Such a strategy would identify key areas where various poverty indicators intersect. Such an approach also acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the issue for each individual and/or group. No one-size-fits-all solution will be viable.

The cornerstones of a poverty-free Ontario: We believe that a viable and lasting solution to poverty in Ontario can be found by focusing on interconnected themes or cornerstones—income and employment, housing and community support services.

Income and employment: The Jewish community, through UJA Federation and its agencies, supports several programs and services that help clients overcome income or employment challenges to find the client sustainable employment with a living wage. Some examples include: Parnossah Works Canada, an innovative confidential service of Jewish Vocational Services that efficiently connects job seekers and employers to place the right person in the right job; and JumpStart, an initiative of JIAS, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, of Toronto, which connects skilled Jewish newcomers to suitable and meaningful employment through job placement, mentorship opportunities, volunteering and networking connections.

Housing: Our community's goal is to ensure that each family is spending no more than 32% of its income on housing, in accordance with CMHC guidelines. The Jewish Community Affordable Rental Program, JCARP, is a reduced rental housing strategy created in partnership with Kehilla Residential Programme and UJA Federation. JCARP works closely with Jewish community service agencies.

Community support services: Unfortunately, economic exclusion often goes hand in hand with social exclusion. For many poor families and families living with disabilities, community inclusion can be prohibitively expensive. As a result, our most vulnerable community members are often relegated to the margins and excluded from the richness of community life. Access to services such as child care, family counselling, vocational counselling and financial literacy remain beyond their reach.

It is essential that the government provides financial incentives and support that will enable the third sector, including non-profit, charitable and voluntary organizations, to continue their important work. These organizations help build and strengthen communities, provide employment and make a positive impact on our economy. As such, they should be recognized as an integral component to the poverty reduction strategy and be supported in the legislation appropriately.

Mr. Stephen Adler: Thank you, Frank and David. As I said at the beginning, some of the recommendations have been said by others. All of our recommendations have been provided to you. I'd like to spend just a moment highlighting some that have not been mentioned here yet today.

In the preamble, we recommend the removal of a reference to a growing economy. Current circumstances

make that unlikely. But do not remove the urgency of the task at hand.

We also recommend that in subsection 6(2), a new clause (c) be included and that it read: "(c) shall appoint an independent body to review the long-term poverty reduction strategy." Nowhere in the proposed bill does it actually say that, and we would like to see it included.

Last, we believe that it's necessary to ensure that ministries do not act in isolation; rather, that they work together to solve the problem of poverty. Other presenters have highlighted the fact that there was a cabinet committee. We recommend going one step further: a similar committee from the bureaucracy, where deputies and assistant deputy ministers sit around the table to discuss and deal with poverty reduction so that ministries do not operate in silos, and, come budget time, they do not fight against each other, but they work together to reduce poverty in this province.

That concludes our presentation. In the short time left, we welcome any questions.

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The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): About a minute per side. Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I think I was first the last time.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): You're absolutely right. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: When they launched this policy, the government said it was contingent upon three things: a growing economy, a federal government that is compliant and community support. I don't think the economy is growing, as you so correctly put out, and I haven't seen the federal government coming on side, save and except possibly for some housing money. Community support is where I want to zero in.

Are you saying that the government should be investing more in the non-governmental office—NGO—sector and other community and social partners and agencies in order to deliver the service? Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Stephen Adler: That is part of it. The other part is to make it easier for third parties to provide service. If there are rules and regulations that prevent a third party from providing affordable housing or make it difficult—a decade ago, you would have said, "Cut the red tape." What we're calling for and asking for, and what we're willing to help you with, is to allow the third party—the non-governmental organizations, the charities, the community associations that are on the ground already—to do the job they want to do.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I need to intervene there, Mr. Prue. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: We run out of time really quickly here.

You talked about an advisory council—I'm not quite sure what you were talking about when you said "inter-ministerial involvement with bureaucrats." Do you have a sense of what ministries you feel are critical to being part of that?

Mr. Stephen Adler: I would copy those who sat around the table for the cabinet committee on poverty

reduction, each minister or parliamentary assistant represented there. The same committee should be struck by the secretary of cabinet and have deputies or assistant deputies sitting around discussing the very same topics, so that while the political hand writes the law, there is an identical table for the implementation, which will go a long way to reduce some of the red tape I was discussing in my answer to Mr. Prue.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm not quite sure what different things we would get from having a table with bureaucrats and a table with all of cabinet involvement.

Mr. Stephen Adler: I think there are a lot of times where we have miscommunication between the political end and the bureaucratic end, and that it is important for the different deputy ministers to be able to be involved at the front, purposely and specifically to deal with poverty reduction only, and have them sit around the table instead of being brought in as needed.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel. Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd like to follow up on the earlier question with regard to community support services. If I have jumped around here accurately, you are indicating further in your recommendations that they be included in a formal public stakeholder process. I think we might particularly want you to spend the time available to talk about housing in the not-for-profit NGO sector. Could you do that for us?

Mr. Stephen Adler: Sure. We are fortunate, I guess is the word—or unfortunate—that UJA has a partner agency called Kehilla Residential Programme. My colleague outlined the JCARP program. What we're saying is that there needs to be room at the table not just for organizations like UJA but, as I said earlier, those who are on the ground providing the service. It is not wise for me to spend an hour talking about the housing needs of the Jewish community when I have, as a resource, Nancy Singer, executive director of Kehilla, who can talk to you about the battles that are going on on the ground.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Munro, and thank you, Mr. Adler, Mr. Spiro and Dr. Bialystok.

METRO TORONTO CHINESE AND
SOUTHEAST ASIAN LEGAL CLINIC
COLOUR OF POVERTY CAMPAIGN

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I invite our next presenters, Ms. Go and Mr. Kerr, on behalf of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic.

You've seen the protocol. As you're seated, I invite you to begin now.

Ms. Avvy Go: My name is Avvy Go, and I'm the director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic.

Mr. Michael Kerr: Michael Kerr, coordinator of the Colour of Poverty/Colour of Change Network.

Ms. Avvy Go: We'll be making a joint presentation this afternoon. I'll start with some general comments about the issue of poverty as it affects racialized communities, and then I'll speak to our recommendations with respect to some of the provisions in the bill. Then Michael Kerr will address some of the long-term proposals we are putting forward to address the root causes of poverty.

The Colour of Poverty Campaign is a province-wide initiative made up of individuals and organizations working to build community-based capacity to address the growing racialization of poverty in Ontario. The clinic is a founding member of the campaign. More information about these two organizations can be found in our written submission.

Poverty in Ontario is not colour-blind. The evidence confirming that racialized communities are experiencing a disproportionate level of poverty is overwhelming. According to a United Way of Greater Toronto report, between 1980 and 2000 in Toronto, while the poverty rate for non-racialized persons fell by 28%, the poverty rate among racialized families rose by 361%. The report also confirmed that Toronto's racialized community members are at least two to three times more likely to live in poverty. The Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto: Child Poverty in the GTA study by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto confirmed that even child poverty has become racialized or colour-coded. Poverty is experienced by one child in 10 among global European groups; one in five among East Asian groups; one in four among aboriginal, South Asian, Caribbean, South and Central American groups; one in three among children of Arab and West Asian groups; and one in two among children of African groups.

It is critical to understand that racialization of poverty is not simply a Toronto problem either. Our written submission cites several studies that were conducted in Hamilton and Ottawa as examples that demonstrate a similar disturbing trend and linkage between race and poverty.

It's also important to remember that increasing racialization of poverty is not gleaned by simply looking at statistics on income and health and wealth, but also from a number of other different measures, such as inequalities with respect to health status and educational learning outcomes; higher dropout or push-out rates among racialized groups; inequitable access to employment opportunities and overrepresentation in low-paying, unstable and low-status jobs; higher levels of under-housing and homelessness and the re-emergence of imposed racialized residential enclaves; as well as the increasing rate of incidence and ethno-racial differentials with respect to targeted policing and the overrepresentation of aboriginal and racialized groups in our prison system.

Given all these facts, there is only one conclusion we can draw; that is, addressing racialized poverty requires systemic and structural solutions.

Bill 152, as it is now drafted, provides a small window of opportunity for the province to start to reduce the general rate of poverty. But to fully tackle the critical

issue of the racialization of poverty, we really have to lift the curtain on colour-blindness. To do so, our two organizations recommend a number of amendments to the bill, which begin on page 6 of our submission.

First, we recommend that the preamble be amended to make the eradication of poverty part of the overall goal of the government's long-term strategy. We also recommend changes to the preamble to reflect that every person in Ontario is entitled to an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

Second, we recommend that a number of provisions in the bill be amended so that any strategy measures and indicators, as well as targets, of poverty reduction developed by the government will be based upon the collection and measurement of desegregated data collected on the basis of race, gender, disability, aboriginal status, family status, immigration status and other such grounds as reflect the disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by these groups in Ontario.

For a poverty reduction plan to succeed, we recommend that the bill should name as one of its core principles the importance of recognizing and acknowledging that racism and other forms of discrimination exist in Ontario, which result in heightened risk and disproportionate levels of poverty experienced by the groups I have just named.

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We also recommend that the bill be amended to ensure that individuals and groups being consulted by the minister will include members of those groups, and groups working with communities of colour, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and newcomers etc.

I call on the committee to consider proposals for change from other committee-based organizations representing these disadvantaged groups.

I'll now turn to Michael to talk about some of the specific long-term measures that will get to the root causes of poverty.

Mr. Michael Kerr: Thank you, Avvy.

I'll take you to page 5 of our submission, where we speak to the critical architecture that's needed in order to affect the kinds of changes that we propose in our other amendments to the bill. We see these four specific recommendations as an opportunity for them to be translated and embedded into the current legislation to give fullest life and expression to the pathway toward change to address the growing racialized inequality.

Admitting that poverty in Canada is racialized is not an easy step to take, and we all understand the hows and the whys of that, but it is a necessary one if you want to develop an effective anti-poverty strategy that addresses the root causes of poverty. We urgently need a comprehensive poverty reduction plan that integrates not only a broad range of universal initiatives, many of which have been spoken to by other deputants today, but, as critical and parallel too, they need to be accompanied by specific targeted measures to remedy the different underlying causes of the vulnerability that exposes racialized

and other disadvantaged communities to disproportionate poverty.

Crucial to best understanding the nature and the implications of this shared challenge is that those who are now ever more concentrated at the bottom of Ontario's economic and social ladders can in fact no longer be fairly treated or referred to as minority populations or communities. In 2006, aboriginal or first peoples, together with communities of colour in the province, made up 25% of the population of the province of Ontario. According to Statistics Canada projections, that percentage will grow by 2017 to a full one third of the province of Ontario's population. That underscores the critical nature of why it is necessary to embed these elements into the legislation. By introducing Bill 152, the McGuinty government has the opportunity to in fact do so.

First, an equity and anti-racism directorate. I won't spell it out; it's written there before you. Second, an equity in employment secretariat to help bring about the necessary and critical changes to equitable access to work and fair pay. Third, an equity in education grant, because, as we all know, that is the foundation of equity in our society: equitable learning outcomes. Fourth, as we move forward with these pathways to address and redress poverty and hopefully over time eliminate poverty, we can incorporate that into our economic strategies so that at one and the same time, as we invest in efforts to address the economic downturn and to rebuild a sustainable economy in the province of Ontario, we can redress the growing racialized disparities.

Ms. Avvy Go: I guess I would just conclude by saying that I think it's very critical that we address this issue now. Otherwise, as poverty rates for some communities continue to be addressed by the government through the general measures, the inequities will continue to grow. So five years, 10 years from now, you may have a 5% reduction in poverty for some the members of mainstream societies, but then that reduction is not going to be applied to racialized groups, to women, people with disabilities, because of the lack of specific measures that target the root causes of their poverty.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We have about 90 seconds per side, beginning with Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I notice that you've been here for other presentations, so I wanted to just go back to an earlier presentation where they talked about inter-generational poverty. They were concerned that we should label such a thing. I heard them say that people work very hard, and I think that's across the board. Parents work hard to make sure that the next generation does better than they did. But would you say that there is a colour-coding in intergenerational poverty?

Ms. Avvy Go: Yes, actually, there are a number of studies, including studies done by the Canadian Labour Congress. They look at the incidence of wealth and income distribution. Second-generation—meaning Canadian-born—members of racialized communities are experi-

enceing higher levels of poverty than their parents. The second-generation Canadian-born are doing worse than the immigrant parent who came before them. Another study found the same thing as well. Part of that is a result of perhaps the lack of equity in the education system, lack of equitable access to jobs. So even though you may be Canadian-born, you may be educated at universities in Canada, you're not getting the same access to employment—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you Mrs. Van Bommel. Mrs. Munro?

Mrs. Julia Munro: If I were to sum up what you have said, from my perspective, what we're seeing is an approach that suggests one size fits all. It seems to me that there are a number of studies which try to identify particular groups that are at greater risk. One of those, for instance, is the issue of high school graduation. It would seem to me that what you are looking for here is to be assured that in the writing of these reports and the setting of these strategies, we don't fall into that one-size-fits-all trap.

Ms. Avvy Go: Exactly. We do have a fairly good social safety network system that prevents people going right to the bottom. But even with that system, we are seeing disparities.

Mr. Michael Kerr: And the one-size-fits-all approach is what, in fact, has led us to this structural, systemic, institutional exclusion and marginalization because we fail to address the particularities that have given rise to why individuals are disproportionately experiencing poverty. That's why it's so very critical that we start, from this point forward, addressing one at the same time—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you Mrs. Munro. Mr. Prue?

Mr. Michael Prue: At the very first deputations, Campaign 2000 and 25 in 5 Network, they asked that adults be listed in the definition. You go further than that. You want targets for groups of individuals at heightened risk of poverty—communities of colour, women, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal and first peoples, and newcomers. Is it enough to include adults or should we compartmentalize it more, as you have suggested?

Ms. Avvy Go: I think including adults is a good step, it's a first step, but just including adults alone is not going to address the inequities that we speak about. So it will have general measures to address adults without the specific target measures for those who are at a higher risk of facing poverty. It's not just for racialized groups, it's women, people with disabilities and so on.

Mr. Michael Prue: And your last recommendation goes, again, further, that individuals and groups being consulted by the minister must include members of or groups working within those groups. The 25 in 5 suggested that it be members of their community rather than government appointments. Are you suggesting it be compartmentalized into—

Ms. Avvy Go: Yes, because you want to make sure that the voices of those who are most likely to live in

poverty will be heard at the table. So it's not enough to say that we'll hear from the anti-poverty groups. Many of these anti-poverty groups themselves may not be representative of these groups. I think it's important to name who these groups are to make sure that they have a say in the final outcome.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue, and thank you, Ms. Go and Mr. Kerr, for your deputation on behalf of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic.

ONTARIO NON-PROFIT HOUSING ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now invite our next presenter, Mr. Lawson of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, and colleagues. I'd invite you to please introduce yourselves as you are speaking. I invite you to officially begin now.

Mr. Hugh Lawson: Good afternoon and thank you. My name is Hugh Lawson and I'm the president of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association, otherwise known as ONPHA. I'm also the director of corporate governance for Toronto Community Housing. With me is Sharad Kerur, who is ONPHA's executive director.

ONPHA represents 760 non-profit housing providers in 220 communities across Ontario. Our members operate more than 160,000 non-profit housing units and provide housing for approximately 400,000 people such as the elderly, low-income families with children, the working poor, victims of violence and abuse, people living with developmental disabilities or mental illness and the homeless/hard-to-house.

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Poverty, we can agree, comes from a lack of income. It means that those who live in poverty experience deprivation and are unable to purchase basic goods and necessities. And it means that access to goods and services that most of us take for granted are out of reach: access to employment, local commercial services and affordable recreational opportunities. But poverty, as we learned during the consultations on the poverty reduction strategy, is a lack of affordable housing as well. It's both.

ONPHA supports Bill 152. The bill is precedent-setting and recognizes that poverty is a multi-dimensional issue that requires action on several fronts. It is essential that we recognize the interactions among housing, social assistance, income support, retraining programs, settlement programs and health care. All of these have a role to play in an integrated strategy aimed at reducing poverty.

ONPHA can speak to the fact that housing is relevant to poverty reduction in two important aspects. First, as the single largest expenditure in a household's budget, the cost of housing can crowd out other necessities and exacerbate an already inadequate income. Second, poverty issues often manifest themselves with the creation of concentrations of poverty, which is directly linked to housing markets and housing assistance.

In terms of housing-induced poverty, ONPHA recently released its annual report on the size of the gap between the cost of housing and incomes. This report, *Where's Home? 2008*, is prepared by ONPHA and the Co-operative Housing Federation, Ontario region, and looks at the state of rental housing markets and affordability in 22 key communities in Ontario. The report also looks at vacancy rates, rental housing supply and changes in rents and incomes. As you might expect, given the backdrop of the economic situation, the news is not good. On average, an astonishing one in five tenant households is spending more than 50% of their income on rent. Over 260,000 households in Ontario are choosing to either "pay the rent or feed the kids." And, as ONPHA's soon-to-be-released report on social housing waiting lists shows, nearly 130,000 households can wait for anywhere up to 20 years for affordable housing.

While poverty occurs at an individual or household level, its existence becomes visible when poor families and households cluster in one geographic area. This usually happens in areas of low-cost housing. Neighbourhoods that become centres of poverty also become marginalized. Economically challenged communities bear the brunt of unemployment, business failures, family stress, crime, substance abuse, deteriorated housing and poor health. And as recent studies have demonstrated, these communities are often racialized.

Clearly, a multi-pronged solution is required. Experience has taught us that programs that direct solutions only at the individual are not as likely to be as effective as programs that are directed at assisting both the individual and the neighbourhood to become stronger. The key policy challenge is to identify and implement the appropriate programs.

It is ONPHA's position that safe and affordable housing must be at the heart of the government's poverty reduction strategy. When people have a place to call home, they can seek and find a job, establish their children at school and maintain a healthy household.

There are three key ways that housing can assist in reducing poverty. The first is at the individual level and involves reducing housing costs through support mechanisms such as rent supplements, a housing benefit or rent-gear-to-income assistance.

The second is by using housing programs as a basis for asset-building. These programs can assist modest-income households to move from rental to home ownership and thus begin building equity. This approach, while fairly new to us in Ontario, is well established in other jurisdictions.

Finally, there is the construction of affordable housing, which can, if carefully done, create healthy and mixed-income communities such as the St. Lawrence neighbourhood here in Toronto and, of course, the revitalization of Regent Park.

It is important to recognize that different solutions belong in different communities. ONPHA strongly supports the need for local communities to identify the program that will work the best for them.

Ontario needs a strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario, and one that recognizes the important role housing plays in that strategy. While the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Honourable Jim Watson, has stated that housing-related poverty issues are best left to discussions within the province's planned long-term affordable housing strategy consultation, we believe that the link between this strategy and the poverty reduction strategy needs to be made. The logical and most appropriate place to identify this linkage is in the proposed Poverty Reduction Act itself.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Khalil Ramal): Thank you very much for your deputation. We have three minutes each for each side. We'll start with Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, and I'm very pleased that you were able to come today, because this is a particular aspect that I think needs to be better understood. I'm always reminded of, "You can't have a roof over your head if you don't have a job, and you can't have a job unless you have an address." I'm particularly interested in any comments that you might make—frankly, for the purposes of Hansard—on issues such as the kinds of housing models that you suggest, I think, on page 4, that you describe as asset-building—and how you might comment on that. How does it differ from co-op?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: Non-profit co-ops are—there's no equity involved in those. So with asset building, typically people are referring to affordable home ownership, programs that are designed to assist families that cannot afford home ownership right away in developing their equity in a home and so on. It's a little different; it's an individual program for individual households.

Mrs. Julia Munro: The other thing, I guess, since we're here because of Bill 152: Are you satisfied with the manner in which reporting and accountability will be done according to the bill as it stands right now?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: I don't believe we've actually got a position as an organization on that.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Khalil Ramal): Mr. Prue, you have three minutes.

Mr. Michael Prue: If the whole thing comes down to, in your view, the building of supportive housing, affordable housing, and that it should have been included, did you ask Minister Watson—you've named him here—to include his upcoming discussions in his poverty bill?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: Yes. We have discussed this with the minister several times, and we've encouraged the inclusion of the two issues together.

Mr. Michael Prue: But it hasn't been done.

Mr. Hugh Lawson: No.

Mr. Michael Prue: Did he tell you why?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: He said that it would be addressed through the affordable housing strategy. He suggested a separate approach was better.

Mr. Michael Prue: Did he give any rationale for that? Because it seems to me that what you're saying is logical, that it should have been included here.

Mr. Hugh Lawson: Not specifically, no.

Mr. Michael Prue: You have no specific plans for reviewing this legislation? We've had other deputants come forward over the course of today suggesting that the review panel ought to be at arm's length from the government, not just be government appointees to, in the end, say what a good job the government's done. That's what often happens around here.

Mr. Hugh Lawson: Typically, in our consultations with our members, we do it with our members, not with people who represent our members. So following that principle, we would appreciate it being done with the people who are affected.

Mr. Michael Prue: And how do you propose the government should choose these people? As an example, should they choose someone from your organization to sit on the review panel?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: As I said, we don't have a position, but it might make sense to include people who are living in social housing, whether it be co-ops or non-profits.

Mr. Michael Prue: Not the people who run them but the people who live there?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: I believe that it's important to include the people who are directly affected by the decisions that will be made as a part of this act.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Khalil Ramal): The government side, Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I just want to go back to—Mr. Prue has repeatedly talked about how this review would be a patting on the back of the government. But I'm not sure—I think maybe we need to clarify something as to what the intent of the review really is. I think the intent, if you look at the legislation, is that the review is to move the whole strategy forward and talk about what's going to be the next strategy, not just to say, "Well, that's nicely done, you know. Over and out."

In the same vein as Mrs. Munro, I'm really intrigued by your asset-building comment and the idea of a rent-to-own kind of process. I think everyone would agree that, in terms of building self-worth in all people, ownership of property is a very important part of that, having something of your own. But how would you see that being financed? Would it be guaranteed loans? How would you proceed with that part of it?

Mr. Hugh Lawson: There are a number of techniques that are currently being used to do the financing. They are second mortgage take-back and limiting the equity that a person can actually gain from that, so that some of the equity goes back into a fund and then some of the equity goes back to the individual.

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But any of these programs can only work for a pretty small percentage of the people who are affected because you do need to be able to invest something. If you have an average family income, like we do at Toronto Community Housing, of \$14,000 a year, it's pretty hard to invest anything.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel, and thanks to you, gentlemen, for your deputation on behalf of the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association.

SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I will now move to our next presenter, Sister Pauline Lally. I invite you, Sister Lally, to please come forward and begin your deputation on behalf of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We'll of course have that distributed immediately.

You have your 15 minutes, so please begin now.

Sister Pauline Lally: Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

I'm Pauline Lally, a Sister of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul from Kingston. We Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul in Kingston trace our roots to a group of dedicated women religious who began our mission in the mid-19th century. Back then our sisters, like so many other religious orders of women, set about working on behalf of the orphaned, the sick and the aged. This was the service, the work of charity, and charity is a bit of a handout. This is not why we are here today. We are not looking for a handout for the poor; we are looking for justice for the poor. Of late, we sisters have combined our service of charity with the work of justice and even set up an office of justice and peace and integrity of creation.

One of my earliest learnings when I was asked to be director of the office was that poverty is political. It is often not by chance that people are poor. Poverty is not necessarily the result of individual moral failure or poor life choices, but of governmental policies. And poverty is a nightmare. We sisters learned that we have to be political, though not in the partisan sense. We have to be attentive to what is going on, think critically and be responsible by learning to be a voice for the voiceless.

A society is judged, as you know, by how it treats its most vulnerable. A society is as strong as its weakest link. What affects one person in Ontario affects all peo

ple in Ontario. We congratulate this government for taking poverty in our land seriously. Bill 152 is a beginning.

In 1995, our justice and peace office started a vigil soon after the government of that day cut social assistance payments by 21.6%. We felt compelled to claim public space in front of city hall every Friday noon. We made this public statement because we believe that targeting our most vulnerable neighbours is unjust. It is a serious mistake to base social policy on blaming the weak for the problems we have. Besides, as you know, investments in social programs are investments in people.

The most attractive places to live and invest are places that are socially inclusive.

We have continued our vigil for 13 years. That's because the incomes of our weakest and economically marginal neighbours have never recovered from the loss that they suffered in 1995.

We have also continued our support for the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, known as ISARC, and its lobbying efforts here at Queen's Park. In the weeks before the budget, the Kingston vigil-keepers chartered a bus to join ISARC's prayer vigil. Together we prayed that you and your fellow legislators would have the strength and courage to finally do something serious about social justice in Ontario.

This is not the first time we have appeared before a committee of the Legislature. We have made regular submissions to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Our appearances before that standing committee have of course focused on the need to make more significant investments in measures proven to be effective in poverty reduction: higher minimum wages, a comprehensive affordable housing program, child care and early childhood education, and dental care accessible to all. These are among the measures that we had in mind when we stood outside this building on a cold March day this winter praying for you and your colleagues, in hope that serious investment in poverty reduction would be included in the budget.

Today we are not urging that Ontario's government make a decision to allocate significant funding for social justice, though we might not stop that. On the contrary, we simply request some important changes to this important law. We are asking that you change the proposed Poverty Reduction Act so that any future government, no matter what its political stripe, will be accountable to the people of Ontario with respect to poverty reduction.

How to do this? Firstly, we believe that Ontario's poverty reduction efforts must be as inclusive as the society that we hope to help build. This inclusivity means that the Bill must go beyond simply promoting strong communities, families and children. As you've heard today from other presentations, adults make up three of every four people living in poverty in Ontario. We believe that making a distinction between poor children and poor adults is the same as the old Victorian distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor. Such an approach is morally bankrupt.

We Sisters of Providence arrived in Kingston in the middle of the Victorian era. We began exhausting and humiliating "begging tours" to raise money for the poor. We made no distinction between the "deserving and "undeserving" in the 1870s, so why should we do so now?

Secondly, Bill 152 needs to go beyond noble sentiments. It must be enforceable. Remember in 1989 how the federal government unanimously resolved to end child poverty by the year 2000? It was a sweeping statement, a noble sentiment with few teeth. We have more poverty today than when that statement was made.

At this point you may be thinking that I'm a well-intentioned but naive nun who thinks that she can end

poverty with the stroke of a pen by passing a law—far from it. Our community has made common cause with many of the other groups that are appearing before you. We know that it is only through sustained, organized public pressure that governments make real changes in policy, including social policy. How did women get the vote? How did workers get the right to organize and bargain collectively? How did Ontario secure laws that protect our natural environment? We achieved those important gains through long, hard organizing efforts.

How did Ontario move towards a poverty reduction strategy? Why are you now deliberating about a Poverty Reduction Act? True, in part, because legislators summoned the political will to begin to address the savage inequalities that rend our communities. But we have also come this far because of a sustained public awareness campaign.

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Our community has made its own modest, local contribution by standing outside our city hall, which incidentally is the first Parliament building of Canada, every Friday for 13 years in all kinds of weather. We've numbered from two to 500. We attend ISARC's Religious Leaders' Forums in this building. We stood with others in ISARC's interfaith prayer vigil this winter.

Such education, lobbying and organizing efforts can be helped by laws like Bill 152 if they include what we believe are simple, friendly amendments, such as those proposed today by the 25 in 5 Network and ISARC, among others.

In the end, it will be up to groups like those appearing before you today and tomorrow to hold future governments accountable. If future governments are to continue the work of poverty reduction, groups like our Kingston vigil keepers need regular and reliable yardsticks by which Ontario's progress in the area of poverty reduction can be measured.

Ontario has an Auditor General so that we can assess how well public monies are spent. We have an Environmental Commissioner to give us report cards on the state of the natural environment. Speaking of report cards, I taught for many years and gave tests, but the students didn't mark the tests.

We need an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly who can report on the state of the social environment. We need this social Ombudsman who can prepare the annual reports on progress in poverty reduction already stipulated in Bill 152. These reports must be independent from the government of the day. They must be delivered to the Legislature every year. This will allow groups like ourselves to praise and/or pressure future governments. This, as you know more than I, is the stuff of politics.

Thirdly, Bill 152 stipulates that the government of Ontario's poverty reduction strategy be evaluated every five years and a new strategy put in place. This is a laudable measure. These strategies are crucial. We need goals and measurements, benchmarks against which we can measure progress. But we think that Bill 152 should be amended so that an arm's-length body, not the govern-

ment of the day, conducts the five-year reviews that will shape the poverty reduction strategy over the course of the subsequent five years.

We hear a lot these days about two words. They inform public discussion of government policy, including social policy. Those two words are “accountability” and “transparency.” We hear them in our congregation too. They are repeated so often that sometimes it seems we lose sight of their importance.

We believe our suggestions for improving Bill 152 reflect the need for future governments to be accountable with respect to poverty reduction and transparent in measuring progress towards that important goal.

Finally, a word about poverty reduction: Our goal should go well beyond poverty reduction. It should be poverty eradication. Persistent poverty in a place as rich as our own is a moral and ethical stain on our social fabric.

The other night at prayer I read from Psalm 41, and it reads in part, “Blessed are they who consider the poor ... they are called blessed in the land.” The psalm even goes on to say that those will be “sustained on their sickbeds.” What a wonderful promise to you who are about the serious consideration of the poor in our land.

In closing, I will simply repeat something that a woman far more dedicated than I said many years ago. Jane Addams was the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Her words adorn the little pamphlet we hand to passersby each Friday noon. She says, “The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.” Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Sister Lally, for your extraordinarily precisely timed remarks, and thank you for your deputation and presence here today.

ALLIANCE FOR EQUALITY OF BLIND CANADIANS

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now invite our next presenter, Mr. Rae, first vice-president of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians. If you could please be seated. Welcome, Mr. Rae, and your time begins now.

Mr. John Rae: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians greatly appreciates the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon to talk about Bill 152.

The AEBC is an organization of rights holders who are blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted. Our work focuses primarily on public awareness in an effort to change the climate of attitudes towards people who are blind, deaf-blind and partially sighted and offering comment on issues of public policy that are important to our community. Clearly the fight against poverty is one such issue.

I want to begin by commending the government for introducing Bill 152 and for enshrining a fight against poverty in legislation. This is new in this province, and

the government deserves to be commended for going this far. But we must go much, much further. Since the very beginning this afternoon, you have heard presentation after presentation by deputants who have called for a variety of amendments to Bill 152. There has been an amazing unanimity on the part of these various deputants, and we want to support those recommendations as well.

In particular, you have heard how disappointed the disabled community was over the government’s poverty reduction strategy because of its focus on children. For our community, many persons with disabilities do not have children. Many people become disabled later in life. Those individuals may have had children or may not have. Many of those children have left the nest. Unless I miss my guess, unless things have dramatically changed today since I left home, most children live as part of families. So we seek a more holistic approach.

We also support the notion of changing the thrust of poverty reduction to poverty eradication or developing a poverty-free province. If we don’t do this, the bill sets us up to fail. In a province like this, if poverty reduction is the best we can hope for, if that’s as much as you’re going to put in legislation, haven’t you failed before we start? That’s not what Ontario is like, I don’t think.

We also call upon a clear, understandable and transparent process of review. Part of that must involve tabling all reports before the Legislature. That will give the citizens of this province an opportunity to judge what progress has been and is being made. It will also remind all members of the Legislature what progress has been and is being made so you, who are members of the House, will not forget that poverty must be a part of your everyday thought process and everyday work. It must not be confined to the work of this committee; it must not be confined to this bill. It must be part of everything the government of Ontario does.

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I’m getting older, like most of you, and as such, I’m becoming a bit impatient to see change. I have a long memory. I’ve been involved in this work for 35 years. I have lived in this province under governments led by all three of your distinguished parties. During my 23 years as a civil servant, I worked under administrations led by all three of your parties. I have heard many statements from all three of you. I have seen many reports produced by the federal, provincial and municipal governments. And what do I find? I’m not happy about this; I’m sad about this. We in the disabled community remain chronically unemployed and are expected to subsist on the margins in chronic poverty, and it’s time that stopped. It is long overdue.

One of the reasons this is the case, I submit, is that we have not been nearly involved enough in the development, and particularly in the implementation, of programs, policies and legislation. These are developed about us, but they’re done without us. So, if I were giving out report cards, I have to admit that I’ve got enough Fs to give all of you. You’ve all failed the disabled community—all three of you.

Think about today. How many members of this Legislature from all three of your parties have a disability? How many? How many people with disabilities work for your parties? How many persons with disabilities are deputy ministers? How many persons with disabilities work as senior policy analysts? Those are the areas of power where policies get developed and delivered, so it's perhaps understandable why we continue to live in the chronic level of deprivation that is our lived experience, and that's got to change.

It's not so easy. Even long before the notion of thinking outside the box was talked about, the federal government, way, way back in 1981, developed the first of a number of landmark reports in this country. It was called *Obstacles*. It was part of the work done during the International Year of Disabled Persons, which incidentally had the theme: Full Participation and Equality. Twenty-eight years later, how far have we come? We've come part of the way but not nearly very far. We sure haven't got to full participation and equality; that's for damn sure.

But they did something differently. The politicians who travelled the country to consult people added to their midst a number of well-respected, well-known people with disabilities. They travelled with the politicians across the country. They were part of the drafting process of that report. It's a report that I think is internationally recognized as a leader. The Andy Scott task force proceeded similarly and produced a great report.

Great reports are not enough, of course. That's not to say that we don't have non-disabled champions, because we do have some—some among all of your parties. I particularly want to refer to Dr. Bountrogianni, the former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who was instrumental in and led the process that resulted in the AODA, a piece of legislation that was different, a piece of legislation that was supposed to change our lives, a piece of legislation that isn't getting nearly where we hoped it might, because ministers change, champions leave and pieces of legislation get moved to other places to get administered.

The accessibility directorate is now housed somewhere in the huge Ministry of Community and Social Services, where it doesn't have nearly the prominence it had when it was in its former smaller ministry. What do we see? We've seen the first standard, customer service, woefully inadequate. We've seen a transportation standard, currently out for debate, that the disabled community basically says doesn't even meet the requirements of the Human Rights Code. I say shame. Shame on this process. It would have happened better had more people with disabilities been involved from step one throughout all aspects of any process that has anything to do with us. I submit that our situation might be better.

That's why the AEBC has called upon all governments to develop a coordinated, comprehensive economic strategy. You notice I don't call it an employment strategy; I don't call it an income strategy. I call it a comprehensive economic strategy, which will deal with

three pillars: One is social assistance; the second is labour market involvement, which is chronically needed; and the third is infrastructure funding that the federal government included in its last budget.

Some of that money must be used to make our colleges and universities more accessible, some of that money must be used to add to the availability of affordable and accessible transportation, and so on and so forth. We need a disability lens so that every piece of legislation, every ministry, every policy that is being developed takes into account the needs of Ontarians with disabilities. After all, we're not an insignificant part of your community and of this province. We're about one in seven members of this province, and yet it seems like our society continues to expect us to remain on the margins, in abject poverty, and that is just not good enough.

So I submit that, yes, this bill is a good start; yes, this bill needs to be amended and expanded. But my greater concern is, what happens after this bill is passed, as passed I'm sure it will be and should be?

I'm more concerned about what you folks can do to make sure rights-holders—you notice I make the distinction that we who live the life, we who have a disability—our organizations; groups like the Colour of Poverty, made up of people who are racialized members of our community; the Chiefs of Ontario—are rights-holders. We're not merely stakeholders. Sure, we have a stake in what happens; that's true. But there must be a distinction between stakeholders—those groups that, yes, have an interest—and rights-holders, those of us who are consumers, who are individuals who live every day the experience of having a disability, of being a person of colour, of living either on a reservation or as a native person in an urban setting; rights-holders. Those organizations must not just be consulted, but must be seconded, must be hired on contract, to be a part of the process.

Groups like AEBC, the ODSP Action Coalition and, I'm sure, the Colour of Poverty and similar groups would be very pleased to recommend individuals who could play the kind of role I'm speaking about: people who are knowledgeable about poverty; people who have experience in developing policy change; individuals who are leaders in their communities and have an understanding of the broad issues that confront us.

Working on one issue has been a common problem with government: You focus on one thing. Well, that's not good enough. There's an interrelationship of issues. It's one thing to have found a job, but if you don't have a place to live, if there isn't transportation in the community where you live to get to and from that job, then finding a job can be a fairly elusive proposition; similarly, if a particular employer is not prepared to discharge its legal duty to accommodate our needs, if we can't get timely access to textbooks that we need and so forth. There is an interrelationship of issues.

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So fighting poverty is not just about passing a bill. This bill is symbolically, and I hope substantively, important. It needs amendment. But what is more im-

portant, members of the committee, is what happens after the bill is passed and what you do to bring groups like mine, who have historically been relegated to the margins, into the mainstream. I hope, before my life ends, that that promise back in 1981 of full participation and equality that sounded like such a wonderful phrase way back in 1981—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Mr. Rae, you have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. John Rae: Okay, my last sentence—that that phrase, “full participation and equality,” will become the lived experience of the bulk of Ontarians who today have a disability and those who will come after us. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Rae, for your presence, your written submission and your very passionate remarks.

THUNDER BAY AND DISTRICT INJURED WORKERS SUPPORT GROUP

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I would now like, on behalf of the committee, to invite our next presenter, Mr. Mantis of the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group. Mr. Mantis, you’ve seen the drill. You have 15 minutes in which to make your combined presentation. The time remaining will be divided evenly amongst the parties for questions, and I invite you to officially begin now.

Mr. Steve Mantis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the committee members. I see some familiar faces around the table.

You know, I don’t know where to start. I’m like John Rae. I’ve been doing this—not as many years; I’ve only been doing this for 25.

I come from Thunder Bay. It’s a small community. Sometimes we figure we’re not even noticed down here in Toronto. Our group, the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group, was started 25 years ago to try to participate in the process of how laws are made and how the system works, or doesn’t work, for workers who end up injured and disabled.

I can’t figure out why, when I look at this bill—which, you know, on first reading you get all excited; there are these wonderful principles of what we should do. Yet to my best judgment, workers who become injured and face poverty aren’t included. Why is that?

There is, I think, a responsibility on government to try to ensure that the systems we put in place for our citizens work effectively, and excuse me, maybe I am a bit jaded, you know? For 25 years—it’s been over 30 years since I lost my arm at work—I’ve been meeting people whose lives are ruined because of their injury and their interaction with one of the government’s bodies, the Workers’ Compensation Board. I go, “Where do we go here?” Is there not an opportunity to put the house in order all the way across the government bodies?

When we look at setting targets and at measuring and reporting, this is what our group has been asking for for our 25 years. As recently as this year, I had discussions

with the Minister of Labour to ask him to ensure that the compensation board would look at what happens to workers after they become injured. Now, what I’m talking about is people with a permanent disability, people like me—well, it’s all different disabilities, but you may not know how many of us there are in Ontario who were hurt at work and have a permanent disability. Right now it’s approaching 400,000—400,000 workers who have been injured seriously enough that their disability lasts them the rest of their lives.

What happens to those? We would think that the system that is there to look after and help people would have that answer. In fact, it doesn’t. In fact we have, as I’ve been saying, been lobbying for all these years and they’ve never seen—all the governments of the day, all three governments, have not put in place a mechanism to actually keep track of what happens to people. So we’ve done research; we’ve seen it anecdotally. We see that the percentage of people who are still employed following a workplace injury permanent disability resembles the national and provincial average. About two thirds of the people who have a disability are unemployed. If you’re unemployed in Ontario, you’re probably living in poverty.

Why are we excluded? I look at the principles. Sub-section 2(2) in the law here says “Principles” and we start with:

“Importance of all Ontarians

“1. That there is untapped potential in Ontario’s population that needs to be drawn upon by building and establishing supports for, and eliminating barriers to, full participation by all people in Ontario’s economy and society.”

So, every year we have 14,000—15,000 last year or 15,500—workers who have a permanent disability from work, and the majority of them are going to end up unemployed. Is that how we fulfill our potential? Here are people who have a work history, work experience, who were adding to the economy, and they’re going to end up in poverty because they got hurt at work? Is that what we call the importance of all Ontarians?

“Importance of communities

“2. That strong, healthy communities are an integral part of our poverty reduction strategy; their potential must be brought to bear on the reduction of poverty.”

I can tell you about the injured worker community. People feel so left out. I’m an optimist, and I get criticized, “Oh, you can’t believe the government’s really going to do something now, eh? You can’t believe the compensation board is really going to do something.” I spent the morning at the compensation board, the WSIB, trying to get our message across. Little steps are being taken, but throughout that time—and I report back to our organization—people say, “Where are you going with that? You’re wasting your time. Look what they’ve done to us.”

I got an e-mail last Thursday from a person I’ve never met before. Because I’m active, I’ve got a profile, I’m on the Net. On page 4, just a little quote—I took it right out

of my e-mail. The fellow says, "I've been injured since 1997 with two back surgeries, lower. I am going bankrupt soon. Severe depression and stress all related to my back pain. Injury has moved up to my upper back and neck. I can barely do normal, everyday activities. I've been in treatment for self-medicating myself on alcohol and drugs. I have two children, five and seven months old, that suffer for me. Me and my wife are at each other's throats. I would love to tell my whole story to you. Please, please, contact me. I don't know what to do. I can't take this stress no more."

We hear this all the time. Here we have a system that is supposed to help people to recover following injury, and this happens far too often. You'll see above these bullets with our percentages. We did a little survey in Thunder Bay. Our group is all volunteer. We get no government funding. We got cut off because we spoke out under the Harris Conservatives. But we did a survey last year and it's in your package, our little report: 71% reported living under the poverty line—71%. These are all people who were working; 42% are receiving welfare; only 18% receive any WSIB benefits. These are people who are hurt, disabled for life, mostly unemployed; 15% are working, 63% are depressed and 15% have contemplated suicide.

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In northwest Ontario some years ago, we saw that suicide was a big issue and we started just trying to keep track, just following the newspaper now and again. In the first year, we would see one a month in our local newspaper, people who had committed suicide who were struggling with the compensation system. We got too depressed; we quit keeping track. So I look at this bill and say, "Oh, my gosh, look at these wonderful things that the government's now going to do. It's actually going to look at this stuff and it thinks we're important, that we should be consulted, that we should be involved." But are we?

This morning when I was at the WSIB I asked one of the senior vice-presidents, "Are you going to be subject to the provisions under Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act?" "No, we don't think so," she said. "I was just talking to our president a little while ago and she said, 'I'm so surprised; no one's talked to us at all about this. This isn't, I guess, anything that's going to affect us.'" Here I'm looking at an opportunity for the government to actually set targets, but let's set them right across the board. It's interesting, the groups that are mentioned here. Of course, people with disabilities—that's who we are. But among our groups, new immigrants are at high risk; women are discriminated against; racialized communities are at higher risk of injury and a lower risk of actually receiving any kind of benefits. So the groups that are mentioned and designated within the legislation are very much reflected in our organizations.

The Sister who just talked about poverty talked about poverty as political. In the last 10 years, we've seen assessment rates, premiums—whatever we call them—that are paid by employers into the workers' compen-

sation system decrease by over \$1 billion a year. Now wait a second; help me out here. Workers are hurt at work. The research shows that most of them get no compensation, long term; short term, yes, the system works pretty well. If you're long term, the chances are that you're not going to be on any kind of benefits. And so, the employers of our province are getting a break. I guess that is political. I guess someone's making a decision here that it's more important to reduce the employers' costs by over \$1 billion a year and subject workers to a life of poverty, depression, families breaking apart. You're saying, let's address poverty, but you've got an institution that is causing it and causing the ravages of poverty. I have to shake my head. I'm going, "Who do I believe? What do I listen to? Are people sincere, or do they not know?" I don't know. I'd like you to help me out.

There's this stigma out there that injured workers are cheaters, that they're fraudsters. We hear it all the time. We hear stories all the time. But we see the hardships and we see that most of these people are in poverty. I'm sure there are some people who take advantage of any system. But why are we all labelled that? Why is there a campaign that we're labelled that and then the government passes laws, one after another, that reduce the access to benefits? I guess there's a political process that takes place here. We don't have the power and we don't have the political clout that other big businesses have. We can't afford lobbyists.

So we've been trying to do research. We've been trying to document this. We've formed a Community-University Research Alliance with a number of academics and are beginning to document these things that we know and have seen year after year and that the government and the compensation system have refused to actually look at and document as well. We hear about transparency and accountability, right? Where is it? Where is the accountability for government systems that are supposed to achieve a goal, but we don't measure whether in fact they do or not?

John Rae talked about having people with disabilities and people affected as part of the process. How effectively do you do that? People have looked into this and researched it and we need to support community groups. In my 25 years, I have seen the government support to community groups go down and down. If you do any kind of political advocacy, forget it. That becomes a no-no. But that is a cornerstone of our democracy. It is citizens participating in the process. If you're poor and you can't afford bus fare to participate in the consultation, where are you at? How do you do it? How do you participate when you have to choose between giving food to your kids and spending the five bucks round trip to go to a government consultation?

I guess there's about two minutes left?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): One.

Mr. Steve Mantis: Okay, well, I guess there's no room for questions.

I will ask you once again, why are we excluded? Is there not something you could do as a committee to

entertain amendments, to bring forward ways so that the intentions that I hear expressed in this act are put into practice, that the other bodies or agencies, boards and commissions that deal with our public—and particularly for us, the WFIB—are required to set goals to reduce poverty, to measure those and to be held accountable for that?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Mantis, for your presentation and presence on behalf of the Thunder Bay and District Injured Workers Support Group.

MARCH OF DIMES

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now invite our next group of presenters: Mr. Steven Christianson, manager of advocacy and government relations, and colleagues, I presume, with the March of Dimes. I would invite you to please first of all come forward, be seated and introduce yourselves as you speak. I'll let you get settled before the official time begins. Thank you. Please begin.

Ms. Janet MacMaster: Good afternoon. My name is Janet MacMaster. I coordinate government relations at the March of Dimes. With me today are my colleagues Steven Christianson, national manager of government relations and advocacy; Bobbi Moore, March of Dimes advocate; and Frank Nyitray, our associate. We are most appreciative of this opportunity to speak to Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act.

I would like to start off by stating that March of Dimes supports the principles and goals of Bill 152 and the government's intention to tackle poverty in Ontario in a substantive and measurable way. Of course, we bring a somewhat different perspective on what poverty actually is for someone with a disability and we will explain this in a moment, as well as highlight areas that we feel could enhance Bill 152. While the initial focus will be on children, a move we applaud, the bill does make specific reference to disability, and appropriately so. Disability can affect anyone, at any age, at any time. It may be present at the time of birth, the result of an injury or illness or simply part of the natural aging process. We are very happy to bring our perspective to this committee.

First, let us give you a brief overview of March of Dimes. Frank, please?

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Mr. Frank Nyitray: Thank you Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Frank Nyitray. I am a person with an invisible disability, so this will have an effect not only on me but on many other people as well.

In nearly six decades, March of Dimes has evolved from a resource-focused organization, raising \$14,000 in 1951 to eradicate the threat of polio, into an organization with an annual operating budget in excess of \$90 million, with which we provide a diverse range of services to help more than 40,000 consumers across Canada live independently and participate in community life.

This evolution reflects our commitment to a strategic approach of identifying need, overcoming obstacles,

adapting to change, and embracing emerging opportunities to improve the lives of the people we serve.

Who are the people we serve? When one looks at our consumer base, one begins to get a perspective of the relationship between disability and poverty. Disability and poverty often go hand in hand. Eighty per cent of March of Dimes consumers have personal incomes of less than \$20,000, and 91% have incomes below \$30,000. A staggering 40% of the people we serve, based on data from the 2007-08 fiscal year, have incomes of less than \$10,000 per year. I repeat: 40% from the 2007-08 fiscal year are living in the city of Toronto, as one example, with less than \$10,000 per year. Seventy-two per cent of service expenditures of the March of Dimes assist people with incomes below \$20,000. Sixty-five per cent of our consumers are over the age of 55, while 2.5% are under 19 years old.

According to government statistical information on the website for community and social services, 1.85 million people in Ontario have a disability, and nearly half—49.5%—between the ages of 15 and 64 are unemployed.

Mr. Steven Christianson: It's safe to say we know quite a bit about poverty and its relationship to someone who lives with a disability.

I want to emphasize that when we speak of poverty, we mean social as well economic conditions. To this degree, we are pleased to see reference in the bill to the importance of communities and families. We are pleased to see benchmarks such as dignity, respect and participation in the planning and public policy process. As we've mentioned, these principles and goals are laudable.

Will it work? Let me reference a few words—of course, they've been referenced before our presentation—found in the bill:

“Importance of all Ontarians

“1. That there is untapped potential in Ontario's population that needs to be drawn upon by building and establishing supports for, and eliminating barriers to, full participation by all people in Ontario's economy and society.”

Those words are flagged for us. “Supports” and “barriers” are also key terms and concepts that we at March of Dimes are very familiar with. The success of this legislation will ultimately be found in those very supports and the barriers they help eliminate.

We know what works in our world. We've consulted widely in other jurisdictions to know what works around the world. For Bill 152 to tackle poverty in a sustainable way for people with disabilities, we know that one of the supports we're going to have to build will involve two things that facilitate participation in community, independence in one's home, and greater involvement in the society and the economy. Those two things are home care, or what many refer to as caregiving; and home modifications. Most importantly, the two need to be treated as interrelated. Let me explain.

Today's emerging and growing need for caregiving supports and home modifications for people with disabilities, especially physical, both of which need to be

formulated as a caregiving strategy, require new solutions, solutions that require the expertise and program design feedback not just from one ministry, not just from one program branch, not just from one service delivery agency, but many.

In order to develop everyday solutions, we'll require the expertise of many disciplines and perspectives to breathe life into the work that will turn this bill into a reality. That is ultimately not just reducing poverty but preventing it. For Ontarians with disabilities, in our experience, as well as in the experience from many jurisdictions around the world, a caregiving strategy that includes home care supports and home modifications that meet and anticipate societal need reduces the cost to government and helps reduce and prevent individuals and families from living in poverty.

I mentioned the fact that we consider other jurisdictions because Ontario is one of the very few without such a comprehensive caregiving strategy that supports home care and home modifications.

We are making progress on a number of fronts, notably the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act—we still have hope in that—as well as several measures announced in this year's budget. But a strategy put in practice to address, alleviate and prevent poverty among Ontarians with disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers, must necessarily recognize the fact that the need for such supports today exceeds the available supply of program dollars, and the need is growing each year.

Since 1999, March of Dimes has administered the home and vehicle modification program. Many of you are familiar with it. It's a program that provides financial assistance to Ontarians with disabilities to install such things as door openers, ramps, lifts, grab bars in a wash-room. These modifications allow someone to remain in their home, in their community. In the 2008-09 fiscal year, we had to reject nearly 50% of all applications, not because the applicants were ineligible, but due to lack of funding. The bottom line is that a home modification can allow greater independence. For example, a spouse can continue working as opposed to having to reduce work hours to care for the spouse with a disability. You begin to see some of that relationship to poverty.

Delivering care to someone in their own home is not only less expensive than long-term or chronic care, it's simply a better option that provides greater quality of life. A high quality of life is a very effective measure against poverty.

I'm now going to ask my colleague Bobbi Moore to speak to the specifics of Bill 152. We only have a couple more minutes, if that's okay.

Ms. Bobbi Moore: We feel that section 5, under the title "Regular consultation," is not specific enough. We feel that there should be clearly established time frames as a starting point for regular consultation, then an additional provision of additional times to meet, as considered appropriate by the minister. We recommend that specific reference be made to the following: an annual

meeting of an advisory body, with cabinet representation, be charged with identifying the champion programs or services that sector and cabinet representatives deem most effective in tackling and alleviating poverty.

Bill 152 identifies a number of specific populations, such people with disabilities, immigrants, and women, and we feel it appropriate to consult annually with key stakeholders in each of these groups.

As regards Ontarians with disabilities, we look to the AODA with hope. Herein is the legislation that will remove the barriers to participation and inclusion, the very barriers that can and often do lead to poverty, the barriers to employment, to housing and to adequate personal supports. We recommend incorporating a reference to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in Bill 152 for people with disabilities.

The initial focus in this bill—and a principal goal—is on children. We applaud this focus. We recommend that an equal ongoing focus will tackle poverty in other populations. To that end, we feel that the minister charged with responsibility of this legislation be referred to as the minister responsible for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Disability can hit anyone at any time, and with that, so too can the increased chances of living in poverty.

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Hopefully, our collective efforts will lead to new programs, policies and, most importantly, everyday solutions that we can continually revisit and critique to set in motion a path of ongoing improvement in the policies and programs that affect our lives and ensure that all Ontarians, particularly those in more vulnerable populations, participate in all aspects of our society and economy.

Honourable members, thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): You have literally 30 seconds each. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thirty seconds: I just want to congratulate you. Good presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Government side, Mrs. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Absolutely. In 30 seconds, there's hardly anything to say but thank you very much for your efforts in bringing forward your suggestions and your thoughtfulness on the whole bill.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, I just would also echo the appreciation, because it's clear one size does not fit all.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thanks to you, Mr. Christianson, Ms. MacMaster, Ms. Moore and Mr. Nyitray for your deputation on behalf of the March of Dimes of Canada.

HOUSELINK COMMUNITY HOMES

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now invite our next presenters to please come forward: Ms. McMurdo and Ms. Berlyne of the Houselink Community Homes. As you've seen, you have 15 minutes in which to

make the combined presentation. The clerk will distribute your written deputation. I would invite you to please begin now.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: We'll just introduce ourselves. My name is Naomi Berlyne, and I work as a community development worker at Houselink Community Homes.

Ms. Susan McMurdo: I'm Susan McMurdo. I'm a person who lives with mental illness and I live in Houselink housing.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: I'll just first explain what Houselink is. Houselink Community Homes provides supportive housing to people suffering from mental illness. We have housing for approximately 400 psychiatric survivors in Toronto. Most of them are single adults. All of our tenants are very low income. Most of them survive on the Ontario disability support program, ODSP. Thus, they are enduring the double challenge of dealing with a mental illness and dealing with poverty.

We applaud the government for taking on the commitment to reduce child poverty by 25% in Ontario. This is an encouraging first step. We do, though, have a number of concerns about the strategy and about Bill 152. Because of time constraints, I'm just going to mention two of them for now.

We're aware that the government's anti-poverty strategy primarily focuses on children and that the government's goal is to reduce child poverty rather than poverty in general. This leaves out a very large number of people living in poverty. The message this omission gives us is that once a poor child reaches the age of 18, they don't really matter anymore.

Most of our tenants are single adults; they're not part of a family. Almost all of them cannot work, or if they can work, they can only work very part-time hours. They are dependent on ODSP, whose rates fall far below the low-income cut-off. For almost all our tenants, their disability is permanent, meaning they're basically condemned to a lifetime of poverty.

Thus, by leaving out low-income individuals like the ones we work with, the government is giving out the message that poor adults without kids, including those with disabilities, really don't matter. We're asking that you include all poor people in this bill. Specifically, in section 2, paragraph 7 of the bill, it says, "a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, families and communities is required..." We ask that the wording of the bill be changed to include the words "adults" or "individuals" along with the terms "children" and "families."

For my second point, I also want to comment on another aspect of the bill, namely when it mentions that regular reviews on the government's progress on poverty reduction will happen every five years. Currently, the bill asks a minister to undertake a review every five years. We support the idea of there being a regular review; that's great. However, we believe that if this review is to be effective and impartial, it should be undertaken by a body that's independent of the government. It makes no sense for the government to review itself. Furthermore,

this independent body that will conduct the review should include those who are closest to the issue, including those who have the direct experience of poverty, as well as organizations who work on the front line.

To conclude, at least my piece, we look forward to the passage of this bill with certain amendments, including those we have suggested, and we look forward to this bill having the effect of substantially reducing poverty for all Ontarians, children and adults alike.

Now I'll turn it over to Susan.

Ms. Susan McMurdo: Thank you. My name is Susan McMurdo. I am a ODSP recipient and a person who lives with mental illness. As vice-president of Houselink's board of directors, I am aware of the challenges faced by our tenants who are heads of families raising children in circumstances of disability and poverty. They deserve supports to help them and their children realize their full potential, and they need the elimination of any barrier that might prevent their full participation in Ontario's economy and society. We know that the future of all Ontarians will be strengthened when Ontario's children and their parents break free of the cycle of poverty.

In that much, I am in agreement with the focus of the proposed Poverty Reduction Act. Families need safe, affordable and stable housing so that children can enjoy continuity in their education and a feeling of belonging to a community. They need high-quality nutrition to foster the growth of healthy, attentive minds and strong bodies. They need to be able to dress in a way that keeps them warm and will not stigmatize them in the company of their more fortunate peers, and to share in the healthful recreational opportunities that enhance the lives of those who are not marginalized by poverty. Children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, but I would like to urge the inclusion of Ontario's disabled population as equally deserving of support, respect and dignity.

At Houselink, we practise a philosophy of recovery. We believe that people can and do recover from the effects of mental illness. With the right supports, there is no telling where a person's potential may lead him or her. Ontarians who live with mental and physical disabilities are a great source of unrealized potential in their communities. If they are afforded the benefits of stable housing, good nutrition and recreational opportunities, and given educational opportunities to help them better realize their untapped potential, Ontario will achieve a new vision of integration into and diversity in its communities. Then, and only then, will the disabled receive the respect and dignity they deserve.

I would ask that section 2, paragraph 4 be amended to read, "That families and the disabled be supported so that they can play a meaningful role in the reduction of poverty and in promoting opportunity."

I would also ask that an independent body monitor the cost of living, with reference to accommodation and grocery costs, tying the Ontario disability support program's benefits to the cost of living. We know that double-digit increases were recorded for many food staples in the last year. These Statistics Canada facts were cited in last Friday's Globe and Mail.

Addressing this situation would go a long way towards realizing the vision of the preamble of Bill 152 of a province where each individual has the opportunity to achieve his or her potential to contribute to and participate in a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We have about two minutes per side, beginning with Mrs. Van Bommel.

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Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you very much for your presentation, to both of you. One comment, which we've heard repeatedly throughout this, is the concern that the word "adult" hasn't been entered anywhere into the legislation. Certainly, with our Breaking the Cycle strategy—which is the first; what this bill wants to do is make many strategies in the future—there has been a focus on children. I think we should, as a committee, take full regard of your comment, as have others, that the word "adult" needs to be recognized. I think many of us, looking at the legislation, assumed that it was incorporated, included in things like the word "community" and that. But I think that for people's comfort, out-and-out description as adults or individuals is probably something we should give careful consideration to. Thank you.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Okay, that's great to hear.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel. Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much. I just want to comment on a couple of the thoughtful comments that you made here. It seems to me that the issues you've identified are questions around the transparency, in terms of who the experts are, who the people are who are going to do the review of any kind of activity of the year or the five-year period.

Also, you mention here a different amendment, that a review has to be "undertaken by a body that is independent of the government." I guess really what we're talking about here is those principles of transparency and accountability. I just wondered if there were any other further elements to that that you feel are missing and that we should be looking at in terms of amendments to this bill.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Are you talking about the review or just the bill in general?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Well, it's sort of a two-part, isn't it? You've got the annual review and then you've got the setting of a five-year strategy. Your comments seemed to focus mostly on the review, and I wondered if you had any to add to the five-year strategy idea.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Anything to add to the five-year strategy idea?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: To me—I don't know if you want to say anything—that's the most important thing, that it be conducted by people who are separate from the government and who are experts on the issue. To me, that's what is key.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Munro. Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: This bill, here in Ontario, is different from bills in Newfoundland and Quebec in that they have not included adults. They have not included the people who suffer the worst poverty, who in my view are the disabled, but followed closely by First Nations, people of colour, new immigrants and women. That's really where poverty is. It's the whole face.

Is it enough just to add the word "adult," or should we be adding, as some of the groups that have come forward today said, very narrow definitions to include First Nations and the disabled? Or is just "adult" enough?

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: I wouldn't be opposed to that idea at all, what you're suggesting.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, they have suggested. You've used the word "adult," so I want to make sure where you're coming from.

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: I'd say at least use the word "adult," but to include other groups would be great.

Mr. Michael Prue: Now, you haven't talked about this, and I'm not sure it's within the scope of the bill, but one of the things this government continues to do is to enforce a clawback. When a disabled person goes out and gets a part-time job—and you've talked a little bit about that—they claw back half of everything that's made. Is that a prescription to a lifetime of poverty?

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: I mean, I've said that many times. I'm not sure whether they believe me when I say it. What do you think?

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Yes, that's a big, big problem. I've spoken to the Minister of Community and Social Services and she said that the way out of poverty for people on ODSP is to work, and that their goal is to get people on ODSP into jobs as much as possible. But what she doesn't understand is that if they go out and work, their income is clawed back 50%. That is not a way out of poverty.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, not unless you can earn \$20,000 or \$30,000 or \$40,000 and have only half—

Ms. Naomi Berlyne: Unless you can earn enough to get off ODSP, and most people on ODSP cannot earn that much. So, yes, that's a big, big problem, a big barrier. I'm not sure the government really clues in to that.

Mr. Michael Prue: But you are hoping that if we can include the word "adult" or even—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue, and thanks to you, Ms. McMurdo and Ms. Berlyne, for your presentation on behalf of Houselink Community Homes.

INTERFAITH SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REFORM COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I would invite our final presenters of the day, Mr. Balmer and Mr. deGroot—

Maggetti, of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition. Gentlemen, please be seated. Your official time begins now.

Mr. Brice Balmer: My name is Brice Balmer. I'm the secretary for ISARC. Beside me is Greg deGroot-Maggetti, who is one of our board members and works with Mennonite Central Committee.

When Deb Matthews tabled the Poverty Reduction Act, she stated, "The only way we're ever going to succeed in the fight against poverty is for it to become a core responsibility of governments now and in the future." ISARC agrees wholeheartedly with Minister Matthews's statement. It is time to make poverty history in Ontario for all people, not just children and parents.

ISARC believes that the Poverty Reduction Act is an important piece of legislation because it lays out a process and a framework requiring the Ontario government to continue to fight against poverty. However, it is not strong enough, as you've heard throughout the afternoon, and does not have enough vision to eliminate poverty in Ontario within the next 15 years.

Faith communities can work to enrich and enable healthy neighbourhoods and communities. Unfortunately, too much of our time, too many of our volunteers, too much money and building space is currently used for charity and for survival programs such as food banks, emergency shelters and soup kitchens. As peoples of compassion, we reach out to those who suffer; we have no choice. It is immoral to allow 10% of the population to live in dire poverty because of job losses, mental health issues, illness or struggles with current and past trauma and abuse. Today, it is time to move to poverty elimination so that all Ontarians can have dignity, be safe and maintain health. The faith community wishes to play a significant role in the nurturing of children and parents, in developing vital community centres and in bringing people together to solve personal and/or neighbourhood problems. We're tired of constantly being the fallback in terms of this charity model.

Over the past several months, ISARC has participated with dozens of other groups and many individuals through the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction in thinking about what is needed for strong poverty reduction legislation. We support these measures, and ask the standing committee and the Legislature to consider even stronger measures than in Bill 152 and within the 25 in 5: Network recommendations. It is time to eliminate poverty, not just reduce it. Let us challenge Ontarians to eliminate poverty in the province within 15 years. It is time for vision, not slight incremental changes.

ISARC began in 1986, when the then Liberal government under David Peterson called together the Social Assistance Review Committee. This was a vision document called Transitions. Since being called into being by that committee, ISARC has worked not only within the faith communities but also with the provincial government, local communities, provincial coalitions and on and on. We've worked because poverty destroys human dignity.

ISARC's board today sees another important moment, especially during the recession, when more and more people in the province are aware of economic vulnerability and would support the elimination of poverty. We look to John Stapleton's work through the Metcalf Foundation to show that positive and significant changes can happen in times of economic turmoil or a recession. Now is the time to put forth a vision.

Greg would like to speak to a few of the recommendations in particular from 25 in 5.

Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti: This afternoon, you've heard many groups come forward and say that this bill needs to lay out a vision for a poverty-free Ontario. ISARC holds to that vision. I would simply point out that the Quebec legislation has that right in there. It talks about the government of Quebec and Quebec society striving together for a poverty-free Quebec. Likewise, Newfoundland and Labrador's poverty reduction strategy lays out the vision "of a province where poverty has been eliminated."

I think it's important that the Ontario legislation includes that vision for a poverty-free province, for two reasons: one, it lets us know where we want to go, what our aim is; but the second is that it recognizes that poverty itself is a barrier to creating a society where everybody can develop to their full potential and participate fully in society. You've heard several presentations that talked about that. I think of Mr. Mantis, who talked about how difficult it is for injured workers to participate in consultations because they're living in poverty.

We also want to stress that in the move toward realizing the vision of a poverty-free Ontario, each poverty reduction strategy needs to set a target for substantially reducing poverty during the life of that strategy. It needs to be in the order of a 25%, 30% or 50% reduction in poverty within the five years of each strategy. As paragraph 2(3)1 reads, it's not clear that the specific target needs to represent a significant reduction in poverty.

Like many other groups, ISARC wants to stress that we're looking for a poverty-free Ontario for everyone. So we would look to insert the language about adults, and we would support many of the other presentations that talked about specific groups that have been disproportionately impacted by poverty, whether that's people with disabilities, people from racialized groups, aboriginal peoples.

ISARC also wants to underscore the importance of having an independent review of the poverty reduction strategy, with clear timelines for when the review should start and be completed and for when a report from the review needs to be tabled in the Legislature.

The review needs to be a step removed from political considerations, so that Ontarians can participate in a frank and honest assessment of what has worked and what next steps need to be taken to progress in making substantive and lasting reductions in poverty on the way toward a poverty-free Ontario.

Finally, section 5 on regular consultations states that the minister shall consult with key stakeholders, including individuals living in poverty. To be consistent, clause 6(2)(b) about the five-year reviews should also specify that the consultation for the review of the poverty reduction strategy include the list of stakeholders, groups and individuals named in section 5. We might also suggest that the committee consider some of the other recommendations that groups have made earlier about naming other specific groups who have been disproportionately impacted by poverty to be included in those consultations.

Mr. Brice Balmer: Based on the serious study of the cost of poverty by the Ontario Association of Food Banks, with the endorsement of Don Drummond, John Stapleton and other Ontario leaders, each Ontarian pays \$2,500 to \$3,000 per year to have poverty in Ontario.

We now have studies showing that reducing poverty is one of the ways of stabilizing our economy in the midst of a recession. But more than this, it is important for all people in Ontario to be healthy, safe and productive. In order to be creative, working and community-involved, all Ontarians need a sense of dignity and respect. Poverty destroys self-esteem and dignity. It is time to make poverty history.

Can Bill 152 create the vision so that we can all work together for the elimination of poverty in Ontario? Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We have about two minutes per side, beginning with Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: As you know, we've heard a real consistency in terms of the messages today, and obviously that's a good thing. I wanted to just ask you, because others have used the Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador ideas, if you are able to give us indicators that they have identified as those which would define the elimination of poverty—because in both cases, you quoted that that's what their goal is.

One of the things we've heard over and over again is the fact that there is no process here for whom the minister would consult with or that it would be public or accountable. So I just wanted to ask if you, as the last presenters, would care to give us some idea about what those characteristics look like.

Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti: Actually, the indicators that have been included in Breaking the Cycle are pretty good. The income indicator of 50% of median income, the low-income measure, is a good income-poverty benchmark. So what would a poverty-free Ontario look like using that indicator? Well, when no household is living with an income below 50% of median income, then we'll know we've reached that target.

It's important that there are other indicators around housing, around health status, education and things like that, because poverty includes income but goes beyond it to other things we need to develop our full potential and participate in society.

So that's actually a good benchmark. It's like the European Union's, except theirs is a little higher. Sixty per cent of median income is their low-income measure.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: The staff have given us a little report here—I don't know whether you've seen this—and it shows the Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador experience, and both of them trend to show that poverty is being reduced, but most importantly, it's not just being reduced for children; it's being reduced for adults and seniors at the same time. I'm very worried that this legislation will have only the effect of reducing poverty for children and actually make it worse for adults and seniors. Do you share that?

Mr. Brice Balmer: Very definitely we share it. Some of us work with people who are single adults who have struggled with unemployment, mental health issues, physical disability or something not of their own making, and they're among the most direly poor. Medical officers of health have now told us that they and also minimum wage workers do not have the amount of money they need to take care of both their housing and their food. We are really looking at social determinants of health, and for social determinants of health, single adults are among the worst off in all of Ontario.

Mr. Michael Prue: We have statistics that 85% or more of people who are disabled and receiving ODSP don't have children, so they'll never see any benefit of this bill.

Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti: That's why we're making the specific recommendations—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. I'll need to intervene and now offer it to—

Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti: I'll answer the question later—

Mr. Michael Prue: Later, okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): —the government side.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm not quite sure why Mr. Prue is going at it the way he is, because this is a bill about strategies; and not just this particular one, Breaking the Cycle, which is our first strategy, but future strategies. I get the impression from Mr. Prue that he's seeing that all future strategies will only address children and families. The requirement under this bill is that every five years a strategy be developed.

We've heard a lot of discussions around the issue of adults. Some people have even said that they want to—and I think you talked about listing some of those, such as disability and injured workers.

My question is, are we running the risk of limiting when we start to list specific areas, so that we actually start, in a way, to entrench and enshrine that certain groups will get attention and others—we don't know what the future may hold. We may find in the future that things do change and more people may need to be included. How do we make sure that, by starting to list, we don't end up limiting or restricting and defining it in such a way that some people actually fall off the table?

Mr. Greg deGroot-Maggetti: Let me suggest a couple of simple words that can be put into those lists:

“including but not limited to”— and then those different groups.

The important thing, and I think this gets to the question that Mr. Prue was asking as well, is that if many groups are included in the consultation process and the review process and given the opportunity to bring forward their ideas for how to update the strategy—and it would be a good thing to actually do this more frequently than every five years—then there’s a better chance for us to really build a comprehensive strategy.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel, and thanks to you, gentlemen, Mr. Balmer and Mr. deGroot-Maggetti, for your participation on behalf of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition.

If there’s no further business before this committee, I remind committee members that we’re in this room for our second day of public hearings, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Committee adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1754.

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