



ISSN 1710-9477

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Tuesday 21 April 2009

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mardi 21 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
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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE

Tuesday 21 April 2009

Mardi 21 Avril 2009

The committee met at 1601 in room 151.

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.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Chers collègues, je vous accueille à cette réunion du Comité permanent de la politique sociale. We are considering, as you know, Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. I trust that there's no business before the committee before we call our first presenters? Fine.

COMMUNITY LIVING ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Seeing none, we will invite our first presenter, Dianne Garrels-Munro, president of Community Living Ontario. Ms. Munro and others, just to inform you of the protocol, there are 15 minutes in which to make your combined presentation. Should there be any time within that remaining, it will be distributed evenly and rigorously amongst the parties for any questions and comments. If you might, please, both of you, just introduce yourselves individually. Your official time begins now.

Ms. Dianne Garrels-Munro: Okay. Good afternoon. My name is Dianne Garrels-Munro and I'm president of Community Living Ontario. This is Tyler—

Mr. Tyler Hnatuk: Tyler Hnatuk, social policy analyst with Community Living Ontario.

Ms. Dianne Garrels-Munro: I just stumble over his last name every time.

I'm pleased to be making a presentation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy on Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act. I would like to begin by providing you with some background information about our organization and about how people who have an intellectual disability are affected by poverty.

There are approximately 120,000 people in Ontario who have an intellectual disability. People with an intellectual disability and their families face rates of poverty that are significantly disproportionate to others in Ontario due to factors such as a history of institution-

alization, unequal access to education, low participation in the workforce, and a lack of adequate supports. These factors can combine to create a cycle of poverty and exclusion that can be hard to escape.

Community Living Ontario is a non-profit provincial association that advocates for and with people who have an intellectual disability and their families. We work toward building an inclusive society where people who have an intellectual disability participate with others in every aspect of their community. This means having a home in the neighbourhood that they choose. It means going to a neighbourhood school with friends and being included in regular classes with their peers. It means having a real job working for fair wages and continuing to contribute to your community through volunteer and recreational activities.

For more than 60 years, community living associations have worked to build communities' capacity to include people who have an intellectual disability through advocacy, community development and by providing essential supports and services. Across the province, there are 117 local associations that are members of Community Living Ontario.

We are pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the government's proposed poverty reduction legislation. Community Living Ontario has been publicly supportive of the government's decision to put forward a poverty reduction plan. Many community living associations participated in the consultations for poverty reduction and highlighted the fact that any strategy to reduce poverty must take into account the unique situation of poverty and exclusion faced by people who have an intellectual disability.

In this submission, we will add our voice to those who generally endorse all of the recommendations for strengthening Bill 152 that were developed by the 25 in 5 Network. We will also take this opportunity to briefly restate some of the broader issues that were raised by members of Community Living Ontario during the consultations that we feel remain unaddressed by this current strategy.

Our first recommendation follows the 25 in 5 Network in urging the government to pursue a poverty-free Ontario. Pursuing poverty reduction will lead to stronger communities that are more inclusive of all people. Strong communities lead to a powerful economy that makes the best use of the abilities and talents of its citizens. However, it is not sufficient to set a goal of reducing poverty.

We must pursue an Ontario that is poverty-free so that every person is able to flourish.

The government should work with the not-for-profit, voluntary and private sectors and with all citizens to identify sources of social exclusion and poverty and work toward a society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. The preamble of the act and subsection 2(1) should be amended to make the pursuit of a poverty-free Ontario the goal of poverty reduction strategies.

Our second recommendation relates to the importance of building an inclusive education system. Ontario's education system is featured prominently in the preamble to the proposed legislation and throughout the government's poverty reduction strategy. Given that the government has chosen to focus its current strategy on children, and particularly the education system, we are concerned by the lack of any specific strategy to enhance access to the education system for children who have a disability.

All children need to have the opportunity to explore their full potential by being supported to learn with their peers in regular classrooms and in regular schools. It is the government's position that "kids should be in classrooms learning together." The reality is that far too many children in Ontario who have an intellectual disability are not included in regular classrooms and do not have the same opportunities to make friends and pursue their education. This leads to lifelong poverty and exclusion.

Nothing would be more consistent with the government's focus on children and intention to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty than to implement an inclusive education strategy to ensure that children who have an intellectual disability are in regular classrooms with their friends, learning and setting goals for their future.

Mindful that this bill is not designed to make adjustments to the poverty reduction strategy, we recommend no change. Rather, we urge the government to initiate a strategy to include children who have an intellectual disability in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood schools before the first reporting date for the poverty reduction strategy.

Our third set of recommendations relate to the importance of addressing the poverty experienced not only by children and families, but also by adults in Ontario. The proposed legislation identifies a set of principles for poverty reduction. These principles look beyond the current strategy to the ongoing work that would be required of successive governments. With these principles, we are glad to see the government recognize that people with disabilities experience a higher risk of poverty.

However, the principle of "commitment and co-operation," as written, only recognizes the government's current commitment to children and families. This principle should be modified to recognize that the government is committed to reducing poverty for all Ontarians, including adults.

1610

Currently, the maximum benefit for a single adult through the Ontario disability support program is \$1,020

per month. This falls below the low income measure which the government has adopted as its poverty measure. A comprehensive strategy is necessary to bring the ODSP benefits to levels that reflect the real cost of living in Ontario.

We also must work toward strategies by which a person can build assets to escape poverty through avenues such as home ownership, savings and investments. We are pleased to see changes made to the Ontario disability support program to accommodate the registered disability savings plan, the RDSP, that will allow a person to hold and use assets without affecting their income security.

However, the changes that were made to accommodate the RDSP introduce a slight incoherence in policy regarding earnings and employment. Currently, a person is permitted to be a recipient of investments made by a family member or friend, yet is not permitted to build their assets through employment. Similar changes should be made to allow a person who is employed to keep more of what they earn without having their benefits clawed back.

We recommend that the social assistance review that will be conducted as part of the poverty reduction strategy look to strategies that will enable a person to earn a reasonable living so that they can build their own capacity to escape poverty.

We recommend that, as part of the government's poverty reduction initiatives, an independent committee be established to examine the benefit rates and to advise the government on where to set them, using rational and just criteria.

We also follow others in recommending that paragraph 7 of subsection 2(2) be amended to read: "That a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, adults, families and communities is required to effectively reduce poverty."

Our fourth recommendation relates to the recognition of the legal capacity of people who have an intellectual disability. The poverty reduction strategy presents a good opportunity for co-operation between ministries to address barriers that prevent people from fully participating in the economy. One such barrier is represented by the challenges encountered by people who have an intellectual disability when they attempt to enter into a legal or contractual agreement. The problem can arise in any number of ways, such as when a person wants to enter into a lease, open a bank account or start an investment such as an RDSP.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states simply that people with disabilities enjoy legal capacity on an equal basis with others, and that countries will provide access to supports that all people may require to exercise their legal capacity. Canada has signed the UN convention and has been a driving force behind securing the provisions that relate to recognizing legal capacity of persons with disabilities.

The concept of supported decision-making was pioneered here in Ontario before being adopted into international

law through article 12 of the UN convention. Through supported decision-making, which is recognized in other jurisdictions in Canada, a person can be supported by those they trust to assist them in making substantial decisions. The person and his or her support group are extended legal recognition for the purposes of entering into legal contracts.

Given the broad range of opportunities that are available or unavailable to a person, depending on the recognition of their legal capacity, we recommend that the government establish a plan to review the issues related to the recognition of legal capacity of people who have a disability as part of its poverty reduction initiatives. We offer our full support and expertise for any initiative, and look forward to working together with the government to resolve this barrier to full participation.

For our fifth recommendation, we add our voice to the other groups presenting on the proposed legislation who wish to link poverty reduction to human rights enforcement and accessibility. Subsection 2(2) recognizes that some groups of people have a heightened risk of poverty. A true poverty reduction strategy must do more than recognize this truth. It must take action to combat the inequality that increases the poverty of people with disabilities: immigrants, women, aboriginal people and racialized minorities. To do so, the Human Rights Code must be effectively enforced.

Subsection 2(2) should include an additional clause that reads, “The enhancement of the enforcement of equality rights through the Ontario Human Rights Code is required to effectively reduce poverty.”

Similarly, our next recommendation relates to linking poverty reduction to the issues of accessibility and enforcement of the Human Rights Code. If people who have a disability are to be included in the poverty reduction strategy, our schools, workplaces and communities need to be fully accessible to people who have disabilities. To achieve this, the provisions and the various standards in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act must be effectively enforced.

We join other groups presenting on this proposed legislation in recommending that an additional clause be added to subsection 2(2): “Meaningful enforcement of the provisions and standards set out by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act is required to effectively reduce poverty.”

Our seventh recommendation relates to expanding on the determinants of poverty that are cited in the bill. Poverty reduction strategies must take account of social determinants of poverty such as access to education, employment, housing, health care and standard of living. Any one of these alone is not a good measure of well-being or poverty.

We recommend that subsection 3(3) be amended to read: “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.”

Our eighth and final recommendation relates to independent reviews. Community Living Ontario endorses

the recommendations of the 25 in 5 Network, providing for regular reviews of the progress on poverty reduction by an independent body reporting to the Legislature. These reviews should include the direct involvement of people who live in poverty, as well as organizations which work to reduce poverty.

We recommend that all references to reviews of the poverty reduction strategy be amended to provide for the review of the strategy by a body independent of government that is comprised in part by people who have an intellectual disability.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the government for moving forward with their poverty reduction agenda and for providing this opportunity to respond to the proposed legislation.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you. We have a very brisk 45 seconds each. Mrs. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much for coming. On page 7, you talk about subsection 2(2) and the enhancement of the enforcement of equality rights through the Ontario Human Rights Code. Could you just give us a little more explanation of what, specifically, you’re looking for there?

Mr. Tyler Hnatuk: It’s just so crucial that there is effective enforcement of the equality rights that are guaranteed through human rights and enforced by the Human Rights Code. We wish to join our voices with those of the 25 in 5 Network and others presenting who wish to link poverty reduction to human rights—

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

Mr. Michael Prue: Just on that same thing, so you can continue talking, that would also include First Nations people, people of colour, aboriginals—sexual orientation and others. Do you feel that the disabled are covered adequately, given that all these other groups are there as well?

Mr. Tyler Hnatuk: That’s why we have an additional recommendation there with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The standards are still in development currently. We’ve been active at those tables, but we want to link poverty reduction to the accessibility law as well.

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

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you very much for coming. Thank you for your presentation. I listened to your recommendations—very important. They will be well taken by our government and by our ministry.

Also, I want to tell you that when we talk about poverty, we don’t specify which groups because we’re afraid to miss anyone. In general, the bill aims to cover every segment of our society: able, disabled, old, young.

So thank you again for your presentation. Hopefully, in the regulations, we’ll include everyone.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thanks to you, Ms. Garrels-Munro and Mr. Hnatuk, for joining us today.

CANADIAN UNION OF
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I'd now invite our next presenter, Mr. Sid Ryan, if he's here.

Mr. Fred Hahn: He's not here. I'm taking his place.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Please come forward. I was convinced we wouldn't be able to note that absence there.

Welcome. You have 15 minutes, as you can see, to make your combined presentation. Please do introduce yourselves as you're making your presentation for the permanent Hansard recording, and as you've seen everything is very brisk and strictly enforced. Please begin.

1620

Mr. Fred Hahn: Hello, my name is Fred Hahn. I'm the secretary-treasurer of CUPE Ontario and I am the emergency stand-in for Sid Ryan. I'll let my colleague introduce herself.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Such things are possible.

Ms. Archana Rampure: My name is Archana Rampure and I'm a researcher with CUPE Ontario.

Mr. Fred Hahn: CUPE, the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Ontario, has about 225,000 members in the province, and nearly 30,000 of them are social service workers. As social service workers, those members see, front-line, the battle against poverty in Ontario every day, the consequences of unemployment and underemployment where too many residents are grappling with these issues in their daily lives. CUPE members in developmental services, child protection, child care, dozens of community agencies across the province, at the WSIB and in municipal social services, through Ontario Works, have reported an increase in the demands for their services created by the current economic downturn. Intake calls and referrals for services are up across Ontario, especially in communities that have been hit hard by job losses and wage deflation.

Poverty is also a personal issue for those people working in Ontario, and many of our members and many folks dealing with social and economic consequences of poverty are actually employed and working for wages that are poverty wages. CUPE Ontario has documented an incredible shift towards part-time and casual employment, particularly in developmental services and other parts of community agencies where, in some places, two thirds of the staff in the province are actually part-time or casual workers who cannot rely on full-time employment. Many of our members, especially those who are racialized, who are new immigrants, have also experienced poverty within their families. Job losses and casualization mean that tens of thousands of workers in Ontario are living far too precariously.

According to a recent report, an additional over 400,000 Ontarians could be driven into poverty in the next two years. It's why, during part of our union's presentation on the budget bill, we talked about ways that we believe that there has to be a comprehensive approach to

reducing poverty in the province. We're glad to see that this bill is here, but we understand, as I'm sure you all do, the huge task before the government. This is a relatively small bill to take on a very large task.

CUPE Ontario urges the government to take real action now to reduce the numbers of those who are suffering poverty as much as possible. This is not just an ethical thing to do, but we believe it's actually the best possible way to stimulate the economy and to ensure economic recovery for the province.

We applaud the stated goals in Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, issued in December 2008, about reducing poverty by 25% in five years. In past times, the government has had to identify strategies for dealing with issues around poverty, and in this act in particular, we're glad to see that there are folks listed as heightened risk. It's important to understand that poverty affects different communities differently, and so immigrants, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups often suffer poverty in a different way. It's also important to note, however, that focusing on children, it will not be possible to actually address child poverty without addressing the systemic reasons why children and their families are living in poverty. In particular, there is clear evidence to show that women are disproportionately affected by poverty, in particular aboriginal women, racialized women, older and immigrant women and women with disabilities. Women's poverty traps them often in abusive intimate, employment and care-giving relationships.

This recession, we believe, is a real opportunity to fix the social deficit in the province. Even when the Ontario economy was in a growth phase, there were far too many Ontario residents who were falling behind on all social performance indicators. With years of prosperity, we know the issues and statistics around child poverty. In 1989, the child poverty rate in our province was 11.6%. By 2006, it had risen to 17.4%. It's an alarming trend and it shows that child poverty rates can increase even during periods of relative prosperity. We believe that this economic situation that we are all dealing with presents a real opportunity for the government in terms of economic stimulus and fighting poverty.

Living in poverty is tragic for the individuals involved, but poverty is also extremely expensive for governments at all levels. The economic recession that has hit Ontario so badly is disproportionately experienced by those who are poor. Those who do not qualify for EI benefits are especially vulnerable as well. In terms of immediate effect on both those who are living in poverty and the economy, directing transfer payments directly to low-income individuals has a more positive effect on economic growth than any personal income tax cut that any government can make.

Low-income individuals spend almost all of their income locally on rent, goods and services. Higher income earners, those who benefit noticeably from tax cuts, are more likely to save that extra tax rebate, especially during an economic downturn. An increase in social assist-

ance, as well as increases to minimum wage, will mean more money in the pockets of people who will spend it locally; that will keep local economies going all across the province. As the Fighting Poverty report notes, low-income households spend a great deal more of their total household income compared to those people in other income tax brackets.

We know that statistical evidence demonstrates that investments in social infrastructure, things like child care, affordable housing, income security for vulnerable residents—all of these things not only create strong communities, but they also stimulate the economy. In fact, we worked with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on the issue of child care in particular, and found that for every dollar that the government would invest in publicly delivered child care, there would be a direct economic benefit of \$1.80. And not just in soft infrastructure like child care and affordable housing; there are real opportunities with hard infrastructure investment, particularly in aboriginal communities. Many of the aboriginal communities across the province, for example, have undrinkable water. There are real opportunities to make concrete, hard infrastructure investments in aboriginal communities that would create jobs for aboriginal Ontarians and fix the heinous problem of unsafe water on aboriginal reserves.

Our province just can't let so many of its residents live in poverty any longer. Too many people are living and working in poverty, and their struggles continue to constitute a collective social and economic loss for all of us. CUPE Ontario believes that financial investment in poverty reduction is not just sound social policy. It's not just the right thing to do. In an economic crisis like the one we're living through, it's more than just sound social policy; it's good fiscal policy. It will help to stimulate the economy.

The government of Ontario has a unique opportunity to simultaneously stimulate the economy and to repair the social fabric of communities across the province. We understand that this will be a complex process, but given how much both individuals and communities have to benefit from an ambitious program of social and economic intervention that addresses the causes and consequences of poverty, we call on the government to engage all stakeholders, including those living in poverty, to be more actively engaged to come up with a more realistic and detailed blueprint for action.

We have some specific recommendations on Bill 152. CUPE Ontario, as did the previous presenter, asks that Bill 152 make a direct and specific reference in its preamble to a "poverty-free" Ontario as the goal of the legislation.

We call on the government to add real targets, standards and recommendations in to the legislation to make it necessary to ensure the implementation of real poverty reduction strategies. Such targets, standards and recommendations should be established with the Poverty Reduction Act through a series of broad and regular consultations with stakeholders, including those people living with poverty across the province.

The act must have legislative commitments on income transfers in a number of areas that will be critical to poverty reduction, including but not limited to:

- an indexed living wage;
- fully addressing all forms of income support;
- not-for-profit, public child care provision;
- labour market participation programs;
- affordable social housing;
- targeted investments in aboriginal communities; and
- other social performance indicators.

Section 4 of the act, the annual report, must include a clause that requires the creation of a poverty reduction commission that includes people living in poverty and all other stakeholders who can independently report to the Legislature on the government's progress in reducing poverty in every year.

We want to thank the standing committee for the opportunity to make a presentation today.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. About a minute and a half per side, beginning with Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, just to go down to your key recommendations, the recommendation that there have to be income transfers in a number of areas that are crucial to the reduction of poverty—and you list them. In the Legislature, I have often heard people talking about First Nations communities as a federal responsibility, and it seems that government is often reluctant to go there, save and except in crisis times like Kashechewan. Do you think the government of Ontario needs to move in that direction, notwithstanding the Constitution?

1630

Mr. Fred Hahn: Aboriginal peoples are in crisis in our communities. They are residents of the province of Ontario. Also, we have a responsibility for them. That would be our position.

While government can and should continue to talk about ensuring, for example, that the federal government lives up to its responsibilities, it should not allow aboriginal peoples to suffer the indignities that are suffered in aboriginal communities across the province. We should step up to the plate and make those kinds of investments. And then, if we need to, we can go after the federal government for investments after the fact.

Mr. Michael Prue: Certainly what Quebec has done, to date.

Mr. Fred Hahn: Indeed.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. To the government side, and Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I just want to also talk about your recommendations. In your second one, you call on the government to add targets. We've heard from 25 in 5 that they don't want targets. They feel that they don't want anything that specific. They want each new strategy to have a target based on, I would assume, the flexibility of the government of the day and the recommendations from the consultations that they would do prior to setting a new strategy. Can you explain why you

feel targets are important when 25 in 5 feels that they don't want them?

Mr. Fred Hahn: Thanks for the question. Absolutely. The reality of having targets is that it gives you something against which to measure your success. Part of the problem of not having anything concrete is that, like many royal commissions, many studies that we've done, and, in fact, in some ways, many pieces of legislation, we can have very good words on paper, but without clear targets and timelines, it's very difficult to measure success. It's why we think that it's important to have some kind of targets that would be clearly articulated, to be able to measure whether or not there has actually been a reduction of poverty.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: But if you set targets now, you're trying to assume what is going to happen in the future. What would happen if the targets were not realistic, or there was a change—

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, but I'll carry on here. I wanted to ask a similar question, in terms of the fact that the legislation that we are looking at doesn't set targets that, it would certainly seem to me, and as you mentioned, you have to establish in order to measure. In terms of this presentation, did you give thought to where you would like to see targets, for instance, because it deals with children? Do you have any specific recommendations that you would make to the committee on those targets set for children?

Mr. Fred Hahn: No. Part of what our presentation actually spoke to was that what we're concerned about is that a singular focus on children, without understanding that those children live in families that are suffering from poverty, is actually a big problem. When we talk about targets, the reality of targets is that they can and should be set, but they can also be flexibly dealt with; right? A report against a target can talk about whether or not it met the target and whether or not the target needs to shift, based on the changing realities of the province. What it does is it gives something concrete against which to compare the work that's been done.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Munro, and thanks to you, Mr. Hahn and Ms. Rampure, for your deputation on behalf of CUPE.

VOICES FROM THE STREET

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I would now invite our next presenter, Mr. Michael Creek from Voices from the Street. Please come forward, Mr. Creek. Welcome. As you've seen in the protocol, you have 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. I invite you to begin now.

Mr. Michael Creek: Good afternoon. My name is Michael Creek and I'm the coordinator of Voices from the Street. I'm a director with Canada Without Poverty, formally the National Anti-Poverty Organization. I'm a

member of 25 in 5. But today I would like to speak as an adult who lived in poverty for 13 years.

I was a visitor in the gallery of the Ontario Legislature when the Honourable Deb Matthews introduced Bill 152. I was there on that historic day enshrining poverty reduction into legislation. I felt a sense of pride that I had played a small part in getting to this stage, but I had this underlying fear of what Bill 152 would become as the years rolled on. Would we have a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy? Would the bill be equitable and consultative? Would those with lived experience of poverty play an important role? Would we set measures of poverty reduction and evidence-based results? Would the government remain accountable and transparent in their actions?

I know the damage that poverty inflicts. For 13 years, my life was shackled to the chains of poverty. I see the damage that is done to individuals each day in our province. Occasionally, I get to see the chains of poverty broken, but the opportunities to escape the deadly clutches of poverty are few and far between.

Bill 152 will commit this government and future governments to a poverty reduction strategy. Each of us in this room and throughout our province has a dream, a wish and a goal of how Ontario should look. We cannot make poverty illegal, but as citizens we have a moral responsibility and an obligation to no longer sit idly by as others find their lives smothered in the ugliness of poverty and social exclusion.

I can imagine an Ontario that is free of poverty, a stronger, healthier province that is equitable and fair. An Ontario that is free of poverty will have an improved economy that will lead this country. We will have strong, healthy communities where each citizen can live those dreams.

As persons with lived experiences of poverty, we should not allow Bill 152 to go forward in its current form. We believe the government has started in the right direction. They have set the bar far too low. We are capable of so much more. We can have a poverty-free Ontario.

Our first recommendation is in the wording in the preamble of Bill 152. We would like to see the following sentence added: "That as a province we will strive to be leaders in poverty reduction, allowing for equality, participation and social inclusion."

Our second recommendation is that we would like the act to include more language around a poverty-free province. Why limit our scope to just poverty reduction when it is within our limits to achieve so much more?

Our third recommendation is that in section 3 a target shall be set every five years or less that will substantially reduce the number of citizens living in poverty within that time period. We would recommend that a target of 5% or more is achievable.

Now we come to one of the most important areas, that of adult poverty. The government through its policy, *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, commits only to the reduction of child poverty. However one wants to see poverty reduced, one cannot

ignore the fact that children are poor because their parents are living in poverty. If the government limits their resources to helping only children or their parents, poverty will remain entrenched in our society and communities. The government, by ignoring the words “adults” and “singles,” is only continuing the bashing of poor people. To think that we could delude ourselves with the idea that helping children will somehow end the scourge of poverty is a mistake. We believe that no child needs to live in poverty. We are only making ourselves feel good by saving the children first, ignoring the causes and effects that have them living in poverty in the first place. Our fourth recommendation is to include the word “adult.”

Our fifth recommendation is based on human rights. In Ontario we have a Human Rights Code. Also, as a province within the federation of Canada, we have a legal obligation to abide by international agreements, covenants and treaties that our federal government signs on our behalf. When you live in poverty, your dignity, your security and your rights of equality are stripped away. You become second- or third-class citizens, because you spend all of your energy and all of your time just trying to survive. We need to strengthen the Ontario human rights laws and enforce those rights. By doing so, we will see a reduction of poverty.

Our sixth recommendation is that annual reporting is essential so that the public and opposition parties will have the opportunity to add their expertise and contribute to a stronger, more robust poverty reduction plan. This will also allow those with a lived experience the opportunity to measure the government’s actions, so we ask that a report to the Legislature be included in Bill 152.

1640

Based on the assumption of an annual report on poverty, we will need to have regular reviews of a long-term poverty reduction strategy. These reviews will strengthen the goals and outcomes of poverty eradication. The strategies that are used for poverty eradication must be evaluated. Are they effective? Are we achieving our goals? These reviews will allow evaluations and recommendations, allowing for realignment and consultation of goals set out in the overall plan. This would be recommendation 7.

The cost of poverty is staggering not just in the monetary sense, but in the loss of human potential and opportunity. Recommendation 8 is an amendment of paragraph 3 of subsection 2(3), “Indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty”, adding the following: “including but not limited to income, education, health, housing and standard of living to measure the success of the strategy.”

We also recommend that the government appoint an independent body that shall review the strategy the government has chosen. The review needs to take place sometime between year three and no later than year four. This review must be completed within a specified timeline; we would recommend a maximum of six months. The review must be tabled in the Legislature within 60 days of the review’s completion.

We would also like to recommend that the government always include those with lived experience to be part of this review. We also feel that Bill 152 needs to be amended so that a consultation includes stakeholders, all other levels of government, members of the public and non-profit sector, business and those who have experience of living in poverty.

At Voices from the Street, we want to be part of the solution to build a stronger, more prosperous province. We will continue our work to eliminate poverty and social exclusion. Thank you for the opportunity, for allowing us to present this submission to the standing committee.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Creek. There’s a generous amount of time per side. We shall begin with the government. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you for your presentation. You brought a lot of different things into this.

One of the things you talk about—and I’m going to go back through your presentation—you talked about the fact that escaping poverty is very difficult, and as you said, opportunities to do that are few and far between. Then you went on to say that you were not necessarily in agreement with the fact that our first strategy is focused on children. I’m agreeing with you when you say that escaping poverty is difficult. With poverty, the sense of being poor is something that becomes very internalized. If we have an opportunity to save a child from that so that they have the confidence and the self-esteem to move away and to grab opportunities when they do come, then I think maybe we’ll see more often an opportunity to break away from poverty. Would you disagree with that?

Mr. Michael Creek: I would disagree with the statement as you have stated it, but I would also, if I could, add a little bit, maybe, to it. We don’t think that any child should live in poverty in this province, but we also know that children look towards their parents and other adults. So when a child sees their family struggling and living in poverty, those effects that will happen to that child have to be measured also. I don’t think we take that into account when we have children who we’re trying to lift out of poverty, but all around them in their communities are people who are struggling. I think that—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mrs. Van Bommel. I’ll need to intervene. Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, thank you. I want to compliment you on the thoroughness of this presentation. In the time that I have, I just wondered if you could give me a sense of more specific information when you say, “We need to strengthen the Ontario human rights laws and enforce those rights.”

Mr. Michael Creek: It’s in connection with—the federal government signs treaties on our behalf. I think that Ontario needs to recognize that when the federal government does that, it’s signing those treaties on behalf of Ontarians, and when we don’t live up to those covenants and agreements, then we’re doing each person in the province a disservice.

For me personally, I found that my rights were stripped away. Many of those rights may not be found directly in the Ontario Human Rights Code, but certainly my right to the security of the person was threatened every day while I lived in poverty.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you, because that's the kind of detail that I was looking for there. The other thing that I would compliment you on are the issues around asking that a report to the Legislature—this is certainly something that we have recognized. This bill, as it is presented, has nothing in there to bring accountability or any kind of transparency to the process, whether it's the annual one or the strategies every five years. So I want to thank you for recognizing those issues, as we have done.

Mr. Michael Creek: Thank you.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: In my view, the failure of the government to date has been that they have focused narrowly only on children. They have left out the whole class of people who live in poverty, whether it be the First Nations community, the disabled, new Canadians, people of colour—just the whole range. I think that's what you're trying to hit on: that the government has to get off this narrow focus. It's not just getting children out of poverty; it's getting everyone out of poverty. Is that fair, in a nutshell?

Mr. Michael Creek: That's pretty well it in a nutshell. What I'm trying to say is, I think the government needs to be also commended on their steps of starting this process. But also we need to hold governments accountable, whether that is the government that is in power now or future governments. We have to be able to have ways and means that we can fight back or change governments' minds about what we think are priorities. I do think that in many senses the focus around child poverty, to me personally, is too narrow.

Mr. Michael Prue: Too narrow. Many of our people who live in poverty, particularly the disabled, have no children. That is not surprising. It's absolutely true. A strategy that involves only children, of necessity, will never assist them at all. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Michael Creek: I agree with you 100%. I was a person who was on ODSP. ODSP, as it stands, is a sentence to a life of poverty. It's commendable that governments give 2% or 3% increases, but it doesn't allow people to get out of poverty. My understanding is that there are going to be reviews of OW and ODSP. Within those reviews, we'll fight for changes that we see that need to be made with OW and ODSP.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue, and thanks to you, Mr. Creek, for your deputation and presence on behalf of Voices from the Street.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF INTERVAL AND TRANSITION HOUSES

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I now invite our next presenters to please come forward: Ms. Morrow and

Ms. Komiotis on behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.

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

Ms. Eileen Morrow: Thank you.

Ms. Wendy Komiotis: Thanks.

Ms. Eileen Morrow: I'm just going to have a little water first.

My name is Eileen Morrow and I'm the coordinator of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, which is a province-wide network primarily of first-stage emergency shelters for women and their children who are fleeing abusive relationships. We have been working on all of the issues that are of concern to the women we've worked with for over 30 years. We certainly know of the experiences of women who are experiencing violence. One of those experiences often is poverty—whether or not women have lived in poverty before they've left an abusive relationship.

Obviously I'm not going to read my presentation in whole, but I would like to first of all comment on a congratulatory note to the government for taking this step forward in terms of putting into legislation the social responsibility of a government to make poverty reduction a priority and a responsibility that cannot be escaped within government policy. I think that's really a significant step forward. I also think that we would like to congratulate the government for setting one target and for speaking about the need to measure, evaluate and report, and to consult, in particular, with those who are affected by poverty. I'd like to congratulate the government for some of the outstanding principles of this legislation, including eliminating barriers, looking toward the full participation of citizens of Ontario in their communities, and so on.

1650

Having said that, I think it's important for us to also come and assist the government of the day and the Legislature as a whole to improve this piece of legislation because we believe that it is a significant piece of law. We know from women who are experiencing violence that violence and poverty are merged in a very destructive partnership that steals women's lives, sometimes quite literally. Poverty keeps women from leaving an abusive relationship. It factors quite highly into their decisions to remain with or leave an abusive partner. It affects their ability to find a place to live. It affects the lives of their children. It puts them into untenable situations between different systems—for example, the oversight of the social assistance system and the scrutiny of the child welfare system, and often they spend all of their time struggling in an exhausting and very debilitating process on a daily basis to survive and to protect their kids.

This act, as I said, is significant, and we want to make some suggestions for improving the foundation, the accountability and the overall goal of this legislation. I'll start by saying that we have noted within the principles a

list of those communities that this government feels need particular and specific attention. We are very troubled that women as a group are not included in that list. We recognize the struggles of single mothers for sure, because much of the work that we do is with women who have left abusive relationships and are facing an uphill battle to raise their children alone. However, that doesn't actually take on the real root of the issue, which is the inequality and inequity of women as a whole in this province, in the country and globally, in fact—internationally. We are very concerned that women do not appear within this list when we know, from reams of research that we don't need to outline here, that women are recognized as a disadvantaged group economically, socially and politically.

In addition to that, as the previous presenter was speaking about with Mr. Prue, we recognize that among women—we also need to address inequity, inequality and discrimination against women: aboriginal women, Metis, Inuit and First Nations women; women of colour; immigrant and refugee women; certainly women with disabilities; women who face regional discrimination in the province of Ontario; older women who are facing years without appropriate pensions, and so on. We know that the poverty of women crosses many constituencies of women that we need to address specifically with regard to their situations.

It's also very important in our assessment that we not only recognize different forms and differential impacts of poverty on groups of women but that we recognize that when those inequities coincide, when they intersect, the poverty and violence against women increases, the poverty impacts increase and the barriers increase to escaping that poverty. These intersections are not recognized within this legislation, and the way that they work together to intensify the impacts of poverty are not recognized within this legislation. So we are suggesting that a list—even if it were comprehensive—needs to also be developed with regard to an intersectional analysis of poverty.

With that in mind, we're recommending that the principles and the foundation of this piece of legislation recognize an equality framework and that the preamble specifically speak to the social, economic and political inequality that women face in Ontario, the poverty that results from that imbalance, and the increased impacts and vulnerability to violence and poverty of women who experience intersecting inequality. We also suggest that paragraph 3 of subsection 2(2) be amended to include the word "women."

We're pleased to see, actually, that the government has spoken about one target—and we heard the question earlier in terms of the different positions on targets and timelines. We need to look at targets and timelines in the legislation and not simply in the preamble, rather than leaving it to political will. In our experience as advocates who work with women, we're often disappointed by the political will of different governments, and I think that we need to have that tool. This legislation, if it passes, is

too important not to be transparent, clear and unambiguous in what it's saying. So we would suggest minimum targets and minimum timelines. We recognize, of course, that the way things go, it's often the minimum that will be used, but we know that there will also be guidance provided, and it could be included in the legislation, with regard to how those targets are developed and the process for doing that.

In terms of building an effective strategy, we do believe that it's also important to talk about some of the ways in which the mechanisms will be developed, and we have a lot of evidence and research, of course, to guide us on this. We know the things that affect poverty and improving people's conditions for life, and those things are not confined to or limited to, but they do include: publicly funded child care; pay and employment equity; initiatives to increase social assistance to reflect the cost of basic needs, at least; enhancement of the social safety net; access to decent jobs and wages; education and training; housing supports; programs to eliminate the barriers based on discrimination; and protections from exploitation, harassment, unsafe working conditions and those intersections that I spoke about earlier. We believe that it's possible to put those and others into this legislation as the means by which we measure, as guidance for future governments, and that minimum targets could be set within those as well.

In terms of accountability, we agree with presenters already here that we need a transparent and objective review and evaluation of any poverty reduction strategy in the government, and we also need that report to be provided within the Legislature for full public debate.

We would also recommend that any strategy to reduce poverty will need money, because after all, isn't that the issue? So we would like to see within this legislation a designation of funding that specifically is protected to deliver this goal, and perhaps a percentage of each provincial budget, based on the need that we're talking about. Certainly, that should be a target and it should be protected.

Finally, we'd just like to speak about the vision. We're concerned that the vision is reducing poverty. We believe that poverty is not inescapable, it's not unending, and we should expand our vision to include a poverty-free Ontario. So we recommend that this legislation be amended to change the wording from "poverty reduction" throughout the document to "poverty elimination."

1700

I'd now like to introduce Wendy Komiotis from METRAC to speak about a report that has been put together by Wendy and her organization, along with the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, that has gathered comprehensive province-wide information for you on the poverty of women.

Ms. Wendy Komiotis: I'm Wendy Komiotis, executive director of Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence against Women and Children.

Eileen has pretty much summed up the issues that are in our report. We did a policy research paper that took a

one-year period in 2008. The research was conducted by Janet Mosher, who is a professor of law at York University.

We went across the province and spoke to over 60 women; as well, we have the input of more than 60 various organizations from various sectors. Clearly, what women told us was that there was a significant link between their experience of poverty and their experience of violence, and that they consciously made choices to stay in relationships that were abusive, despite the trauma of those experiences, because of their poverty and the hardship they experienced.

So I think it's really important to underscore the importance of integrating in this legislation women as being impacted by violence and impacted by poverty in a particular way. Even though it's important to recognize children and how children experience poverty, women are often the primary caregivers of children, and this clearly came out in that they choose to stay in those relationships as a way to support their children.

There are a number of recommendations that we came up based on what the women told us, and I'd just like to quickly run through those recommendations and wrap it up.

Your legislation must include women as a whole.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): You have 40 seconds left.

Ms. Wendy Komiotis: Sure. That stands not only for women who have children but women who do not have children; older women who have raised their children; young women who experience disproportionately high rates of violence and stay in abusive relationships because of their poverty; and all those other intersections, including women with disabilities and aboriginal women, as has been mentioned.

I think it is also important in your legislation that when you speak of the elimination of barriers, you recognize that discrimination is a significant barrier, and the stigma of poverty is a significant—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): With regret, Ms. Komiotis, I will have to call this deputation to an end. I would thank you on behalf of our committee, Ms. Morrow and Ms. Komiotis, for your deputation and presence on behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.

CANADIAN AUTO WORKERS

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I would now invite our next presenters to please come forward. They are Mr. Watson and Mr. DiCaro of the Canadian Auto Workers. Gentlemen, please join us. I invite you to be seated. Your official time begins now.

Mr. Angelo DiCaro: Thank you very much. The CAW welcomes the opportunity to submit our views and recommendations to the consultation process regarding Bill 152. The CAW represents over 225,000 workers across Canada. Since our founding in 1985, CAW membership has grown and diversified. We now represent

workers in 17 identifiable sectors of the economy from auto manufacturing, aerospace and transportation to retail, hospitality, health care, mining, gaming and many others. Most CAW members—about 62%—live and work in Ontario.

We appreciate the provincial government's commitment to continue engaging the people of Ontario in a discussion around poverty reduction. Poverty in Canada is a grave social and human injustice and a black mark on the reputation of our province and our country. The CAW is committed to the goal of eradicating poverty and will do everything in our power to work with the provincial government to make this goal a reality.

We believe the provincial poverty strategy released on December 4 of last year is a bold first step in tackling one of the most important challenges facing Ontarians today. It lays out a comprehensive program to address many of the social and economic factors that contribute to the persistence of poverty. However, the CAW believes that one of the failures in the government poverty plan is that it specifically frames the discussion around the issue of child poverty in Ontario only and fails to capture the full extent of the problem. This is especially concerning as the current economic recession worsens, job losses continue to mount and more Ontarians in all sectors of the economy are at risk of slipping into poverty.

The plan also misses the mark on a number of important and necessary policy levers, as we see it, especially in regard to the long-overdue increases to social assistance rates, a firm commitment to maintaining and monitoring minimum wage levels against the rate of inflation, and improved access to collective bargaining for working people.

I'm going to ask my colleague Steve to provide a bit more context to this and then we'll get into our recommendations on Bill 152.

Mr. Steve Watson: You see our reports. I'm just going to quickly highlight a few things of concern about the content of a poverty reduction strategy—what it should contain.

First of all, the most obvious is that social assistance rates, the ODSP and OW rates, are simply too low. They can't be justified from any objective point of view. Even the minister has said herself, on occasion, that there is no justification for these rates and that that has to be addressed. They're not justifiable from the point of view of the cost of nutrition, real rents or basic needs.

On the minimum wage, we commend the government for the fact that there has been a substantial increase in the minimum wage, and another increase is due. But we got into this fix in the first place because from about the mid 1970s on, generally speaking across the country, minimum wages were not indexed to inflation for a prolonged period of time. What we need is the \$10.25 implemented now, plus an indexation formula so that we don't wind up back in the same fix that we had to finally correct. I think that speaks for itself.

We also believe, as a union, that government is not the only agency that can reduce poverty. We are very good

redistributors of income. The CAW and our brother and sister unions in the province and in the country are very good at it. Give us the tools to do the job; stop tying our hands behind our back. We had a card-based certification system in this province from 1950 to 1995 that allowed workers at least some reasonable chance of joining a union and exercising the right to collective bargaining. You have effectively taken that away from the majority of workers who try to organize with this forced second vote that only gives employers the opportunity to threaten and intimidate workers who try to access a public right—the right to free collective bargaining. You know that the solution is to put back in place that certification system and make other improvements to the labour code. That would also be part of a poverty reduction strategy.

Mr. Angelo DiCaro: In the broader context, we'll get into more specifics on Bill 152. Again, we commend the government for taking this step, but we believe the plan, as it's proposed in the legislation—the proposed legislation—must go further in policy prescriptions to address the instability and insecurity many Ontarians face. We stand in support of the proposed amendments to Bill 152 submitted by the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction and, in addition, the CAW provides the following recommendations for your consideration.

Firstly, we believe Bill 152 needs to identify a more ambitious and holistic plan for poverty reduction in Ontario that not only establishes a 25% target for the reduction of child poverty in five years, but an equal reduction target for all Ontarians, including working-age adults and senior citizens.

It doesn't require us telling you this, but in the past months, tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs in this province have disappeared, with many more on the horizon. The rapid deindustrialization of our economy is coupled with a steep decline in good-paying, family-supporting jobs, threatening the future viability of hard-hit industrial communities like Windsor, Kitchener-Waterloo, St. Catharines-Niagara, Thunder Bay, Oshawa and many more.

1710

It's also important—and we'll stress this—that older workers and senior citizens are groups at risk of deep poverty, especially as pension plans in this province remain in a precarious state, and there will likely be thousands of retired workers and other community and labour groups on the steps of Queen's Park on Thursday to drive that point home.

Our first recommendation to Bill 152 is that the language of paragraph 7 of subsection 2(2) be amended to read: "That a sustained commitment to work together to develop strong and healthy children, adults, seniors, families and communities is required to effectively reduce poverty."

The CAW strongly believes that these twin goals of eliminating poverty in Canada and creating opportunities for individuals to find good-paying, stable jobs in industries that are contributing to healthier and more vibrant communities that promote environmental sustainability are inherently linked.

The Ontario government has already taken a bold step forward through its Green Energy Act, which aims to create 50,000 new green-collar jobs in the province, generating billions in economic activity. We shouldn't stop there. Investments in public infrastructure—transit, housing, public parks—and community revitalization projects, especially for low-income communities in this province, can play a tremendous role in moving Ontarians into meaningful employment and, at the same time, contribute to an improved standard of living by maintaining healthy and more sustainable communities.

So we recommend that the standing committee include language that would fall under subsection 2(2) and added as the eighth principle, under the heading, "Good, Stable Jobs in a Sustainable Economy," with text that reads, "That all Ontarians are entitled to work in good, stable jobs that also promote strong, healthy communities and contribute to environmental sustainability."

Mr. Steve Watson: I'm going to go straight to recommendation 3 and read it. It has to do with nutrition.

Building on the recommendation provided by the 25 in 5 Network, we recommend that paragraph 3 of subsection 2(3) be amended to read: "Indicators that are linked to the determinants of poverty, including but not limited to income, education, health, housing, standard of living, hunger and the ability of an individual or family to afford the cost of an adequate nutritious food basket to measure the success of the strategy."

We actually thought it odd that nutrition and hunger would not be included as measures of success against poverty. We know that there's an increase in the use of Ontario food banks. That's noted in our paper. We also know that 37% of all the users of food banks are children, but we have very specific, identifiable ways of measuring that success. There is the cost of a nutritious food basket, depending of course on the size of the family, that's done by public health officials—not by us, by Toronto Public Health and public health officials in other parts of the province. We can measure that. We can measure the increasing use of food banks or the decreasing use of food banks as a way of measuring the success of this strategy.

Just to wind up, we appreciate the opportunity to submit our proposals and look forward to working with the government to achieve these goals. Thank you.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you for including the issue of hunger. It's one of the first times we've heard that. There was a report in the Toronto Star last week about people living in poverty, particularly adults going hungry one or more days a week in order to make sure their children weren't hungry. We only measure child poverty here, not measuring the hungry mother or the hungry father.

Tell me what other things you think we can do. Do you think this government should act on increasing the rate? It's been suggested \$100 a month for a healthy food basket would go a long way.

Mr. Steve Watson: Yes, we agree with that. That was put forward by the 25 in 5 Network. We also think that basically the structure of OW and ODSP benefits should be structured around three measures: the real rents, the real cost of nutritious food baskets, and then basic needs, as determined in consultation with people who have a lived experience of poverty. Without that consultation, there is no effective way of measuring what basic needs really are.

Mr. Michael Prue: There's no way that the people living on Ontario Works or ODSP, which pays more, come anywhere close to the poverty line. Everyone who lives that way lives in dire poverty. What kind of amounts are you looking at that the government should increase them?

Mr. Steve Watson: We're looking to at least restoring what was in place in this province prior to the cuts that were made in 1995. In fact, it's quite—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. We'll need to intervene there. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm just going to go a little further with what Mr. Prue started, which is hunger and nutrition as indicators. Certainly in the current Breaking the Cycle strategy, what we want to do is develop a deprivation index, which includes—the index is under development right now with Food Banks Canada. So that's in the current strategy. You're saying you want this included as well in the bill as an indicator?

Mr. Steve Watson: Yes.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Because in your presentation, you cross over between the current strategy and the bill itself, and I'm just wonder what you're—

Mr. Steve Watson: Well, within the bill itself to actually name “nutrition and hunger” right within the body of the bill, so that the entire province, the public, everyone knows that we can measure success of the strategy against those targets, against those factors, as well as other factors. Correct? Obviously there's a crying need to do that.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Okay. So you want to include this in the bill itself.

Mr. Steve Watson: Yes, in the bill itself, absolutely.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: On page 11, when you're talking about hunger and nutrition, it occurred to me where you've suggested that the bill should include education, health, housing—the determinants—this bill has no baselines. So many presenters have expressed the frustration that there's no way to measure when you don't have some kind of point of departure. I just wondered, when you were talking about those specific determinants, if you would also support the creation of baselines so that in fact when you come to look at those annual reports and the setting of a new strategy every five years, you'd have those baselines from which to work.

Mr. Steve Watson: Yes. Of course, in principle, baselines would be useful, as long as we see what baselines are actually used. But we know the costs of real average

rents. That is from a public source, from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. We know the cost of nutritious food baskets. That comes from public health; it doesn't come from us. The other thing that would be a little more difficult to measure would be other basic needs besides shelter and nutrition. That's why we stress that the only meaningful way of measuring those things would be in consultation with people directly affected. That would have to be meaningful consultation. But even when you look at shelter—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Munro, and thanks to you gentlemen, Mr. Watson and Mr. DiCaro, for your deputation on behalf of the CAW, Canadian Auto Workers, and your written submission.

REGISTERED NURSES' ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now invite our next presenter, who I know quite well and doesn't seem to be in the room, Doris Grinspun.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Katch Koch): She is.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Where? Oh, there she is. There you are. You're hiding. The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, RNAO. As you've seen, Ms. Grinspun, your protocol is 15 minutes. I invite you to please begin. Please do introduce your colleagues as well.

Ms. Doris Grinspun: Thank you very much. I am the executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and my colleague, Dr. Lynn Anne Mulroney, is a registered nurse and a policy expert working with RNAO.

Every day, registered nurses across the province are working with their clients and neighbours as they struggle to meet basic needs for nutritious food, affordable shelter and human dignity. From our nursing practice and from a growing body of scientific evidence, we know that poverty harms health and puts people at a greater risk for early death throughout the life cycle.

As poverty is such a threat to the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities, RNAO welcomed the release of Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy in December 2008 as a strong start to building a stronger, healthier, more inclusive society. Now, more than ever, in these challenging economic times, we say that bold and sustained leadership is required because the promise of this strategy must be fully realized in improved living conditions and healthier, longer lives for all Ontarians.

1720

RNAO urges the Standing Committee on Social Policy to strengthen Bill 152 so that it will more effectively fulfill its purpose of establishing mechanisms to support a sustained, long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario. RNAO's recommendations for amendments and their rationales are explained in detail within our written

submission, but I would like to emphasize a few key points here.

Vision of a poverty-free Ontario: In order to build a stronger, healthier, more inclusive Ontario, we need to work together toward a vision of a poverty-free province, rather than the more modest and ambiguous goal of reducing poverty. We need to be explicit about the final destination as a province without poverty, while recognizing various measures of poverty reduction as necessary intermediate steps toward the ultimate goal.

A comprehensive strategy must not exclude adults. While RNAO fully supports the need to reduce child and family poverty, it is also absolutely essential that single adults not be excluded from a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty.

We also need to enhance enforcement of equality rights through the Ontario Human Rights Code. Principle 3 of this bill recognizes that immigrants, single mothers, people with disabilities, aboriginal peoples and racialized groups currently have a heightened risk for living in poverty. To give this important principle teeth, it is essential to make an explicit link with human rights legislation as a mechanism to address discrimination. A human rights approach would also be consistent with article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself/herself and of his/her family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his/her control.”

We also want to strengthen this bill to increase transparency, accountability and public engagement. RNAO joins with other community members such as the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction in urging that this bill be strengthened by making it explicit that the specific target for poverty reduction shall represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years.

Within four years of the release of *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy*, an independent person or group should be appointed to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation and effectiveness of the poverty reduction strategy. This independent review should be tabled in the Legislature in order to enhance accountability, transparency and credibility. It is essential that a meaningful consultation process be initiated so that those who have direct experience with poverty and social exclusion would be encouraged and would have the opportunity to fully participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of the poverty reduction strategy. In fact, we should make the mechanisms such that they will be supported to participate. The government will then be able to issue a revised long-term poverty reduction strategy for Ontario based on the independent review.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the opportunity to provide these recommendations, which we hope will help

realize the vision of a poverty-free Ontario. We look forward to working with you in making this a reality.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you. We have about three minutes for questions, beginning with Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Just going through some of the things that you highlighted, and I noticed that you have others as well—your comment, “A comprehensive strategy must not exclude adults.” I think we’ve been hearing that very loud and clear from many, many people. I don’t think I saw that when I read it, but the perception in the community is that we have somehow excluded adults. Like I said, we certainly have heard that very loud and clear.

But we’ve also heard from other groups who feel that we need to start listing and be more specific. Do you feel that that’s important, or would the term “adults” be broad enough that it would capture all the people who should, at some point, benefit from a strategy on poverty?

Ms. Doris Grinspun: I would ask my colleague Lynn Anne to intervene, with her expertise on this.

Ms. Lynn Anne Mulrone: We by no means want to exclude anybody. We see a vision of an Ontario where every single person in the province should have the ability to have what they need to be healthy and not be excluded. When we are figuring out what exactly to do, it would be important to figure out what the groups are that might need special attention.

We do know, as other speakers have mentioned, that women, racialized communities, people from aboriginal communities, the disabled—there’s a whole number of people who might need special attention. We wanted a comprehensive approach that meets everybody’s needs. Nobody should be living in poverty.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So you think we would be at risk of excluding someone if we were to do a list per se, or do you think that using the term “adults” would capture all of them?

Ms. Doris Grinspun: If a list will assist you in moving to clear targets for the elimination of poverty in Ontario, then we will welcome a list, and we will probably be suggesting additions or augmentations to the list.

At the end of the day, what nurses want to see is an Ontario free of poverty. For some of us who have chosen to come to this country from other countries that are not as well-to-do as ours, it’s very concerning to see these levels of poverty.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Van Bommel. I need to intervene now. To Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I’d like to comment on page 6, on recommendation 8, where you suggest that the annual report should be tabled in the Legislature. Certainly, this is a common theme that we’ve heard. As you know, there’s no such responsibility in the bill as it is currently.

I also wondered if you wanted to comment on the fact that every five years, there’s also a strategy-setting opportunity as well as the annual report, and whether or not you had looked at that five-year process as one as well that should be within the public domain.

Ms. Doris Grinspun: Yes, we are requesting the tabling of progress so that the public can be aware of how much progress we have or have not made. We also, as you know, are requesting the full review, comprehensive review, after four years. That will allow us, together, to build the next five years of strategy.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: A couple of questions, if I can get them in. The first one is that you want—"An independent person or group ... should be appointed." Do you see this person like a commissioner? We have an environment commissioner, or the Ombudsman, who report to the Legislature and not to the government. Is that what you see, that kind of person?

Ms. Doris Grinspun: Absolutely, and with a process that is transparent and open to the public.

Mr. Michael Prue: All right. So you think that it ought not to be a government appointee but a Legislature appointee.

Ms. Doris Grinspun: That's absolutely correct.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. That's the first one. The second one is on the consultation process to involve those with direct experience with poverty. How do you suggest that these people be chosen? Right now, when the government chooses and puts their nominees forward, the opposition has to just say that we don't like them, which isn't always kind. Do you see that the groups themselves—the 25 in 5, the nurses' association, people like that—would put forward nominees?

1730

Ms. Doris Grinspun: Absolutely. I suggest that we all do, but also people living in poverty, experiencing poverty, should be able to put their names in and be supported to participate in the process and encouraged to do that. So not only groups like ours but people actually living in poverty should be able to access that directly.

Mr. Michael Prue: I love both of your suggestions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thanks to you, Ms. Mulrone and Ms. Grinspun, for your deputation on behalf of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION, ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I now invite our next presenters to please come forward: Michelle Gold and Pam Lahey of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

As you're being seated: You've seen the protocol. I invite you to please begin.

Ms. Michelle Gold: Hello and good afternoon. My name is Michelle Gold and I'm the senior director of policy and programs with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario. With me is Pam Lahey, community mental health analyst. We're with the Canadian Mental Health Association. We're a provincial association com-

mitted to improving services and supports for people with mental illness and their families, and to the promotion of mental health for all people in Ontario.

I wanted to talk very briefly about the impact of poverty on mental health and on people with mental illness. Poverty, as you can imagine, has a devastating impact on quality of life and often leads to poor mental health. The evidence indicates that poverty, and the material and social deprivation associated with it, is a primary cause of poor health among Canadians. People may experience economic hardship as a result of a variety of difficult life situations. The resulting lack of monetary resources creates not only low income but poverty in other essential resources such as housing, education and employment. As a result, of course, it impacts one's mental health, and in particular, situations of depression and anxiety often follow this route of stress and strain.

For people who are predisposed to mental illness, losing stabilizing resources such as income, employment and housing can increase the risk factors for mental illness and relapse. Experiencing a mental illness can interrupt a person's education and their career path and result in diminished opportunities for employment. Lack of secure employment, in turn, affects one's ability to earn an adequate income. As a result, people with a mental illness often remain in chronic poverty.

We're encouraged that the government has proposed a bill and has developed a strategy which will enshrine poverty reduction efforts in law. We are proposing several amendments to existing sections of the bill, as well as recommending several additional clauses that we think need to be addressed, due to omissions, that can help strengthen Ontario's goal to reduce poverty.

Regarding the preamble, we recognize that the bill establishes a vision that guides the poverty reduction strategy. We, like many others, feel that the vision should be broadened and that it should be guided by a vision for a poverty-free Ontario.

Consistent with Ontario's plan to measure progress in reducing poverty as defined in the poverty reduction strategy and in section 3, we recommend an amendment to the preamble so that the language of the preamble signifies the government's obligation to act to reduce poverty as opposed to leaving it merely as a commitment. We think that the language would be strengthened if it were amended to say that the government of Ontario will regularly consult with respect to the strategy, it will measure success, and it will report annually on the success of the strategy.

Regarding the principles, we're pleased to see that the poverty reduction strategy and the bill recognize the heightened risk of poverty among people with disabilities. Evidence indicates that individuals with disabilities, including people with serious mental illnesses, experience more poverty and for longer periods of time than Ontarians who do not have a disability. A significant number of people with disabilities receive income support, and an overwhelming number of them are adults. In fact, 86% of people receiving income support from the

Ontario disability support program caseload are single, or couples without dependent children. As you've heard before, we also believe that adults need to be included and explicitly recognized in the poverty reduction strategy. We would like to recommend a way to address this in the next section of the bill.

In addition, the commitment and cooperation section of the principles—that's where we see the principles saying that they need to address children and families. But while we recognize that children and families are a first priority for the government, children eventually reach adulthood, some individuals will choose to not co-habitate in families due to personal preference or disadvantage, and independent seniors are often significantly affected by poverty as well. We think that recognizing adults needs to also be enshrined in the principles of the bill, and we therefore recommend that adults be referenced in paragraph 7, subsection 2(2).

Regarding the contents of the poverty reduction strategy, we agree that specific poverty reduction targets, initiatives and indicators be linked to the determinants of health, and they need to be written into the legislation. We think that in order for this to happen, part of the strategy, in fact, needs to include sustainable funding. We feel that this needs also to be included in the bill.

Regarding the targets themselves, we agree that if we're going to create progressive targets to reduce poverty in the long term, the review needs to be included under section 6. But we think that the option of "or otherwise" in this section is rather vague. We want to ensure that there isn't a way out and that measuring the progress of poverty reduction does take place. Therefore, we recommend that the option of "or otherwise" be removed from the bill and, therefore, we can have more progressive targets identified and it will be ensured that it happens.

Regular reviews are essential to ensure that poverty reduction targets remain timely, relevant and effective. We recommend that an independent body of stakeholders be appointed by the government to lead the review. This stakeholder committee should include people with experience living in poverty. This will ensure that any new strategies and revisions align with the identified needs of those it's intended to serve.

In addition, we need to make sure that it's a timely review. We therefore recommend that the review itself take no longer than six months, and that this be inserted in the bill itself, and that the review should be tabled in the Legislature within two months of its completion so that there isn't a protracted period where the information isn't coming forward.

Those are the main things that we wanted to address today. We're here to take your questions. We think that the government has made a good start, but we think the bill can be strengthened. We'd like to work in support of the government on this initiative. We would be happy to receive any questions from you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We have about two minutes per side. Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much. I certainly appreciate the comments that you've made here because

many of them, of course, we've heard. There's just one area that I wondered if you would comment on. When you talk on page 3 about the poverty reduction target, I'm just wondering if you have advice in terms of the need to establish a baseline in terms of measurements so that there can be a very clear demonstration of movement in certain areas of success and how it's to be measured. Do you have any concerns about the need to set those kinds of baseline indicators?

Ms. Pam Lahey: We do, and we've given it considerable thought. We would like to see a cumulative effect so that each target that is set every five years after the review is greater than the target that was set before that, so that in the end, we see an increased reduction of poverty among adults and children.

1740

Some of those specific indicators were written into the strategy itself—and you could go back and revisit that—such as the social deprivation index. We applaud the government for establishing it, and we think that the development of a social deprivation index really needs to begin. We would be happy to assist in any way we can in that process. I think that will provide a broad set of indicators and will really indicate very concretely what goods and products are needed to increase quality of life for people who are living in poverty.

We also would go back to additional indicators to measure poverty, such as maybe the market basket measure, which was adopted by the Newfoundland government—

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

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, just back to the whole question of people who come to review: You heard the previous deputant when I asked the question about having a commissioner. Do you prefer, or do you think that there's a need, to have a commissioner reportable to the Legislature? Or have you thought about that?

Ms. Pam Lahey: We have thought about that. In our submission, you may note that we've asked for an independent body that will lead the review and that would be government-appointed. But it's very clear that it's an independent body made up of people living in poverty, and they would not just be consulted. It wouldn't just be an advisory body. They would lead the review.

Ms. Michelle Gold: Did you say "commissioner" or "commission"?

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, commission or commissioner. I mean, right now, we have an integrity commissioner, an environmental commissioner, an Ombudsman. They all report to the Legislature, not the government.

Ms. Michelle Gold: Right. I think a commission would be what is needed.

Mr. Michael Prue: These people you propose be chosen, would you choose them in the regular way, or would you allow the groups like 25 in 5, the nurses' association, yourselves, to have the opportunity to put forward nominees?

Ms. Michelle Gold: I think you need to do both, because there are different ways to participate in a public

process. So, for the commission or committee itself, you could accept some nominations from some of the key groups that have been proponents of this. In addition, it should be opened up to others. As Doris said before, I agree that there needs to be support for people to participate in a process they may not be familiar with.

Ms. Pam Lahey: So, both. There's not just one way to recruit to a commission.

Mr. Michael Prue: If there's time, you want some things put into the preamble and not the legislation. Can you tell me why you want it in the preamble and not in the legislation—consultation, measurement, reports?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Sorry, I'll need to intervene there.

Mr. Michael Prue: There you go. I tried.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): To the government side, and Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I'm going to follow up on where Mr. Prue was going, because I know exactly where he's leading. Again, a preamble is not binding, whereas when it's in the legislation, it is. My curiosity was the same, as to why you would make those suggestions for the preamble and not for the body of the legislation.

Ms. Michelle Gold: I think it could definitely go into the legislation itself. The preamble is not as binding as what the actual act will be. So, yes, you're quite correct that it could go into the actual body of the bill.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I also want to go back to page 4 of your presentation, where you talk about "a cumulative reduction." We've had other suggestions where the words have been "substantive reduction." I understand your concern that people want to make sure that there are clear and decisive reductions, and that they are major reductions, not just little increments at a time. But can you explain the whole concept of cumulative? Is that cumulative based on today, and you would say in five years, we would expect—

Ms. Michelle Gold: That's right, that it's progressive.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: —that when we reach our 25 in 5, and then are we going to—how would you—

Ms. Michelle Gold: Actually, in fact, we need both, but cumulative in terms of progressive and increasing and expanding. It also would need to be substantive.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Yes. I'm just a bit confused on where you want to go with this. That's my—

Ms. Pam Lahey: For example, if the target led us to pull 100,000 people out of poverty today, then in five years, the target that would be set would have the potential to pull 200,000 people out of poverty. In that way, we are working toward a poverty-free Ontario and—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Van Bommel, and thanks to you, Ms. Gold and Ms. Lahey, for your deputation on behalf of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario division.

INJURED WORKERS' CONSULTANTS

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I would now call our final presenters, Mr. Tilley, M. Hudon, Mr. Mc-

Kinnon, Ms. Lunansky and Mr. Buonastella, on behalf of the injured workers' community clinic.

Je comprends que nous avons un francophone aussi, ou non ?

Interjection: Richard, oui.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Bienvenue à tous.

You've seen the drill: 15 minutes in which to make your presentation. I invite you to begin now.

Mr. John McKinnon: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, members of the committee. I'll just occupy this seat for a minute to introduce our presentation and then I'll turn it over to one of my copresenters.

My name is John McKinnon. I'm with Injured Workers' Consultants community legal clinic. With me today, on my right, is Eddie Tilley, an injured worker and a member of the Bright Lights Injured Worker Group that meets in our legal clinic. On my immediate left is Ms. Laura Lunansky, a staff member with Injured Workers' Consultants, and on my far left, Richard Hudon, an injured worker and a member of our community board of directors. About to take my seat in a minute is my colleague Orlando Buonastella, who is also a staff member with Injured Workers' Consultants.

Injured Workers' Consultants is a community legal aid clinic, a clinic that specializes in workers' comp. We are one of 79 community legal aid clinics across the province that deals with a variety of issues that fall under the catchment area of poverty law. Our mandate includes, as well as case-by-case representation, addressing the systemic or some of the root causes of poverty in our community. So that's what we'd like to talk to you about today: a different community than I think you've heard about, although you did hear from the Thunder Bay injured workers' group yesterday, I believe.

Before I turn it over to Mr. Buonastella, I'd also just like to acknowledge the support that we have this afternoon from the Women of Inspiration injured workers' group, who made a special trip down here to watch the committee proceedings.

With that, I'll turn it over to Mr. Buonastella.

Mr. Orlando Buonastella: The research is clear: Injured workers are part of the fabric of poverty in Ontario. As Steve Mantis told you last night, injured workers ask, "Why are we not clearly part of the solution, part of the poverty reduction strategy?" Our brief details the research that documents the poverty of injured workers. I want to touch on three examples of that, and I turn to page 2 of our brief.

Many injured workers unfortunately have to rely on social assistance rather than the workers' compensation system. In 2005, there were 3,148 injured workers on the Ontario disability support program, ODSP, who were also in receipt of WSIB benefits, clearly lower than ODSP. The actual number is much higher because these figures do not take into consideration those who are no longer on WSIB benefits or who never got into benefits from the system but should have.

Non-reporting of injuries—and I'm looking further down—is a big problem. In 2008, there was an actuarial

firm called Morneau Sobeco that estimated that there were perhaps 25,000 unreported workers' compensation claims in 2007. If you do the math, you can see what an issue that is for the ODSP system and what kind of downloading occurs.

Homelessness: In 2006, the Street Health Community Nursing Foundation surveyed the homeless population and found that 57% of the homeless population reported that a workplace injury played a role in their becoming disabled. About half of them—slightly less than half—had received workers' compensation benefits in the past, but no longer. So this gives you an idea of the kind of downloading that takes place on the ODSP system and how injured workers are part of the poverty fabric in Ontario. And it wasn't supposed to be. The system was supposed to be taking care of injured workers because injured workers lost the right to sue, and it no longer plays that role for the permanently disabled.

I'll turn it over to Laura Lunansky for some more comments.

1750

Ms. Laura Lunansky: Our written submission will address the poverty of injured workers in a bit more detail, particularly the problem of deeming, so I am just going to focus on two ways we think this bill can be improved upon.

The first thing is that we think the bill could be strengthened by including all of the government in the poverty reduction strategy. It's not clear, from the present wording of the bill, whether it intends to include agencies, boards and commissions, but we hope that after hearing from us today, you will agree that they should be included. We think that adding commissions, boards and agencies, including the WSIB, to the initiative and including them as part of the solution would be beneficial to the end goal of reducing poverty.

More specifically, we have a few suggestions as to how the WSIB could be addressed. First of all, we would like the bill to ask the WSIB to formally recognize the barriers and stigmas that injured workers face as persons with disabilities, particularly in finding sustainable employment. Second, we would like Bill 152 to ask the WSIB to collect information on poverty rates and employment rates for injured workers and to disclose the information that they collect. This will give us a better idea of the scope of the problem, and it will allow us to better identify solutions. Finally, we would like the bill to ask the WSIB to formulate and implement strategies that address the poverty of injured workers. For instance, we think there's a lot of room in policy reform, and that would be a very good place to start with that. That's my first suggestion.

My second suggestion for improvement is something I'm sure you've been hearing a lot, but it's worth repeating, and that is that 25% is a good goal, but it's a modest goal. We think you can do better, specifically in the case of injured workers. Historically, the main goal of workers' compensation has been to insulate workers against poverty. You can see from the statistics that we

have in our submission and from what my colleague has told you about that the current legislation is not really doing a very good job of that.

Changes to the legislation and policy are one way we can eradicate poverty for injured workers. This would free up resources such as health care and social benefits. This could then be put towards the broader goal of eliminating poverty for everyone across Ontario.

Thank you for your attention today. I'm now going to turn things over to our injured workers, who are going to tell you a little bit about their own experiences with poverty.

Mr. Eddie Tilley: Hi, my name is Mr. Tilley, and I was injured at work. I was a hard-working man, and I ended up being injured at work. I'm here today to give a personal testimony as someone who's living in poverty and somebody who has fallen through the WSIB cracks.

When I got injured, I was accepted into the LMR program, labour market re-entry. I was put into a bunch of courses that were probably too difficult for me to get through as it was, with the type of education that I've had in my lifetime. The courses that they did put me through stated that you needed basic computer experience in order to even get into the entry level of it. I didn't have that, so I kept falling back and falling back and falling back. Even with all of these courses, nothing would have worked out. I ended up with non-compensable injuries: two frozen shoulders and a hip problem. With those, I couldn't finish my courses, and I ended up being demoted to ODSP.

Now, I haven't eaten all day today, but after we leave here we are going to have a meeting with Injured Workers' Consultants, and they're going to feed me tonight. I have a modest one-bedroom apartment in the Beaches, and in order for me to sustain that one-bedroom apartment, I have to eat at the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd centre is closed down, has been closed down for the last couple of weeks and is going to be closed down for another week. What I have to do: I have 21 different places here that I have to go through as to whether they are going to feed somebody today. Some of them are just good for Tuesdays, some of them are good for all week and some of them are just good for maybe a breakfast, a lunch or whatever. Yeah, you're definitely looking at poverty right here.

In order for me to even get downtown, I have to do volunteer services, because welfare will offer you \$100 out of \$109 to do that. So if it wasn't for these places right here, you would probably see a whole lot more people dying in the streets. They are dying of hunger as it is, but it's only these places that are helping them survive. Thank you.

M. Richard Hudon: Bonjour. Mon nom est Richard Hudon, accidenté de travail qui combat la pauvreté depuis 48 ans. Vous me comprenez tous ?

Le Président (M. Shafiq Qadri): Ils ont accès à la traduction. Continuez.

M. Richard Hudon: D'accord. Merci beaucoup.

En mai 1961 alors, j'avais 17 ans. J'ai perdu ma jambe gauche, amputée en haut du genou suite à un accident sur un chantier de construction. J'étais, à ce moment-là, un apprenti charpentier.

Compensé sous le vieux programme de compensation d'avant 1990 avec une déshabilité établie à 51 %, avez-vous une petite idée, chers membres du comité, de combien était ma pension annuelle voilà 48 ans passés ? C'était 62,56 \$. Je me suis mis à clamer et à crier très fort, « Vive la pauvreté ! » À 62,56 \$ par mois—alors, j'avais 17 ans—on ne pouvait absolument pas vivre. J'étais devenu un pauvre. « Vive la pauvreté ! » Pourtant, personne ne remettait en question le fait que j'étais devenu un amputé.

Après maintes luttes de la part des accidentés du travail pour l'indexation de nos pensions, nous espérions que nous sortirions de la pauvreté. Savez-vous combien je reçois aujourd'hui, après mes 48 ans de combat contre la pauvreté ? Savez-vous ? C'est 952,65 \$. Je suis encore sous le seuil de la pauvreté, même avec 952,65 \$ par mois.

Moi, j'ai attendu de la part des gouvernements répétitifs, depuis 48 ans, qu'un projet de loi soit proposé pour la réduction de la pauvreté. Je suis plus chanceux que certains de mes confrères accidentés qui, eux, ne sont pas ici aujourd'hui à cause qu'ils sont décédés dans la pauvreté. Je n'ose pas croire le sort qui a été réservé à leurs enfants.

La preuve que nous soumettons dans notre mémoire vous démontre clairement que la majorité des accidentés du travail de l'Ontario sont effectivement sous le seuil de la pauvreté : ils vivent en pauvreté. J'ose espérer que les membres du comité, ainsi que de notre gouvernement, reconnaîtront le statut des travailleurs accidentés comme un groupe ciblé dans cette législation et en tiendront compte.

Je vous remercie beaucoup.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): The presentations are concluded?

Interjection: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We'll have about a brisk one minute per side. Ms. Van Bommel.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: At this point, I really just want to say thank you very much. Your presentations have been very moving, certainly. Thank you again.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Ms. Munro.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Yes, thank you. I want to just compliment you on being able to come here and present

your personal story. I want to also recognize, as others have done, that this is a category that should receive treatment—when I say “treatment,” I mean accommodation—appropriate to the issues that you face. I would certainly urge the government, when they're looking at rolling out any strategies, that they have to be tailored to people like you who need special attention and different kinds of benchmarks.

Interruption.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Munro. As you know, I believe that is a vote coming. You have one minute, Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: It may in fact be, or it may not; I'm sure somebody is going to hand over a form for tomorrow.

In any event, you've added something brand new that no one else has talked about, and that is to include the agencies, boards and commissions. You've mentioned the WSIB. Are there any others that come immediately to your mind? I agree the WSIB has to be there. Do any others come to your mind at all that need to be included?

Ms. Laura Lunansky: There are none that come to mind immediately. Obviously we're in the best position to speak about the WSIB because that's the kind of work we do. There probably are others, but I think the WSIB is in a unique position because they do provide income replacement benefits for workers.

Mr. Michael Prue: Right. In your view, have there been enough increases—obviously not—to people who have been injured on duty over the years to sustain themselves above the poverty line?

Mr. Orlando Buonastella: No. The stats are very clear about that. Permanently disabled injured workers have terrible problems: In terms of the cost of living, they're falling behind; and in terms of employment, the unemployment rate among injured workers is somewhere between 60% to 80%. All of them, if they belong to the new system, are—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Prue. Thanks to you, Mr. Tilley, Mr. McKinnon, Mr. Buonastella et vous aussi, monsieur Hudon, for your presentation on behalf of Injured Workers' community clinic.

If there's no further business before this committee, I remind members that the deadline for filing amendments is 12 noon, Thursday, April 23. The committee is adjourned until clause-by-clause consideration at 2 p.m., Monday, April 27. Committee adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1801.

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 21 April 2009

Poverty Reduction Act, 2009, Bill 152, Ms. Matthews / Loi de 2009 sur la réduction de la pauvreté, projet de loi 152, M^{me} Matthews	SP-657
Community Living Ontario	SP-657
Ms. Dianne Garrels-Munro	
Mr. Tyler Hnatuk	
Canadian Union of Public Employees	SP-660
Mr. Fred Hahn	
Ms. Archana Rampure	
Voices from the Street	SP-662
Mr. Michael Creek	
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.....	SP-664
Ms. Eileen Morrow	
Ms. Wendy Komiotis	
Canadian Auto Workers.....	SP-666
Mr. Angelo DiCaro	
Mr. Steve Watson	
Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario	SP-668
Ms. Doris Grinspun	
Ms. Lynn Anne Mulroney	
Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario.....	SP-670
Ms. Michelle Gold	
Ms. Pam Lahey	
Injured Workers' Consultants	SP-672
Mr. John McKinnon	
Mr. Orlando Buonastella	
Ms Laura Lunansky	
Mr. Eddie Tilley	
M. Richard Hudon	