

Action Alert:

Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances end in 2008

Starting in 2008, the Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances provided through Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) will no longer be paid out in lump sum payments, as the provincial government starts to move benefits for children out of social assistance and into the monthly Ontario Child Benefit program.

Background:

In 2007, the provincial government introduced the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). The OCB is a new monthly benefit that will go to all eligible low-income families with children, whether they are working or receiving social assistance benefits.

Starting in July 2008, eligible families will get a monthly benefit of up to \$50 per child. This money will be included in the federal Child Benefit cheques that come out around the 20th of every month.

Families on social assistance currently receive a Back-to-school allowance of \$134¹ per child, paid in August, and a Winter Clothing allowance of \$111 per child, paid in November. Starting in 2008, these allowances will no longer be paid this way. Instead, the money will be spread out over the year as part of the OCB. This means that between \$15 and \$20 of the monthly \$50 OCB cheque will be money that used to be provided to families through the allowances.

Why is this a problem?

This change will cause real hardship for families who count on the Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances to provide for their children.

Social assistance rates are already so low that families on social assistance cannot afford to pay for these expenses out of their regular monthly benefits. That's why the allowances were needed in the first place.

And, given the low rates, it is unrealistic to expect that families on social assistance will be able to "put money aside". The money they get from the OCB will be needed to pay for basic expenses like food, shelter and transportation.

This September, will children have to go to school without supplies? In November, will parents be forced to choose between paying the rent and giving their child a warm winter coat?

Moving child benefits out of social assistance and into the Ontario Child Benefit is generally a positive step. It signals that society is taking responsibility for helping low-

¹ This Back-to-School amount is for children over age 13. The amount for children aged 4-12 is \$73.

Back-to-School and Winter Clothing Allowances End in 2008

income families with some of the costs of raising children no matter where their income comes from. And it means that families will not lose these benefits when parents move off assistance and into a job.

But ending the Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances will hurt families on social assistance. These allowances must be restored!

What you can do:

1. Tell your MPP that you want the Back-to-school and Winter Clothing allowances to be restored.

Find out who your MPP is by going to the Legislative Assembly website at: www.ontla.on.ca/web/home.do?locale=en

2. Write or e-mail the Ministers responsible. Tell them this change is unacceptable and that you want the allowances restored.

The Hon. Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Community & Social Services
80 Grosvenor Street, 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9
Email: mmeilleur.mpp@liberal.ola.org

The Hon. Deb Matthews
Minister of Child and Youth Services
14th Floor, 56 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3
Email: dmatthews.mpp@liberal.ola.org

3. Get your Municipal Council, District Social Services Administration Board (DSSAB) or Public Health Board to pass a resolution calling for the allowances to be restored. A sample resolution is below:

Whereas the Province has implemented the Ontario Child Benefit with monthly payments scheduled to begin in July 2008; and,

Whereas the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit will restructure social assistance so that basic needs for children and the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances will be eliminated from OW and ODSP benefits; and,

Whereas the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances serve a specific need for families receiving social assistance; and,

Whereas families receiving social assistance do not have adequate finances and will not have received the appropriate notice period to allow them to save money to address these particular needs;

Therefore be it resolved that [this organization] call on the Province of Ontario to continue to issue both the back-to-school and the winter clothing allowances;

And further that these allowances be paid 100% by the Province of Ontario;

And further that this resolution be forwarded to Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario, Madeline Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services, Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services, and [local MPP].