



INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CENTRE  
Centre d'action pour la sécurité du revenu

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February 12, 2021

via email at [submissions@ontario.ca](mailto:submissions@ontario.ca)

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
Minister of Finance  
c/o Budget Secretariat  
Frost Building North, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
95 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1Z1

**Dear Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy:**

**Re: 2021 Budget consultations**

On behalf of the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) we are pleased to provide a written submission for the 2021 Budget consultations. We have also attached a more fulsome pre-budget submission.

ISAC is a specialty legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Our mandate is to advance the rights and interests of low-income Ontarians with respect to income security and employment. We carry out our mandate through test case litigation, policy advocacy, community development and public education.

Founded in 2001, we are governed by a community Board of Directors representative of all regions of Ontario. Our Board includes legal clinic caseworkers and people who identify as low-income, with representation from Indigenous communities, racialized communities, people with disabilities and recipients of income support benefit programs.

At this time, we hope you will consider our recommendations set out below, which are informed by ongoing consultation with our community partners on issues relevant to our mandate.

### **Recommendations**

Informed by ongoing consultation with our community partners on issues relevant to our mandate, we make the following seven recommendations for the Spring 2021 budget:

#### **Investing in Justice for Workers:**

- **Recommendation #1 - Legislate paid sick leave:** Legislate 10 Personal Emergency Leave days in the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, including 7 days of paid sick leave. Legislate an additional 14 days of paid sick leave during declared pandemics.

- **Recommendation #2 - Enforce workplace health and safety:** To protect workers and curb the spread of COVID-19, mandate increased and ongoing proactive inspections of Ontario workplaces for health and safety violations, with at least quarterly inspections for high-risk sectors, and impose deterrent penalties on violators.

### **Investing in Income Security Programs**

- **Recommendation #3 - Immediately reinvest provincial savings into social assistance:**
  - a) Raise social assistance rates immediately by 1.5% to restore the 2018 cut, and by 10%, 7% and 5% for the subsequent three fiscal years after for Ontario Works (OW) and by 5% for the subsequent three fiscal years after for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), to follow the goals set in the *Roadmap for Change* (2017).
  - b) Reinstate retroactively to March 2020 and distribute automatically for the duration of the pandemic, the Emergency Benefit in the amount of \$100 for single individuals and \$200 for families.
- **Recommendation #4 - Allow Ontarians to keep more money in their pockets:**
  - a) End all clawbacks on COVID-19 related federal benefits including the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB), the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB), the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB), and other federal benefits including Canada Pension Plan Disability (CCP-D) and Employment Insurance (EI) for the duration of the pandemic. Forgive all overpayments – which only deepen poverty – for those social assistance recipients who accessed the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).
  - b) Eliminate the \$10,000 limit on voluntary gifts and payments and raise the limit on cash and other liquid assets to \$20,000 for OW recipients. For ODSP recipients, eliminate the \$10,000 limit on voluntary gifts and payments and raise the asset limit to \$100,000. This will help alleviate poverty among social assistance recipients in the present and in future.
- **Recommendation #5: Ensure the success of modernization of social assistance:**
  - a) Invest in robust trauma-informed and client-centred wraparound services including addiction and mental health supports, childcare, disability supports, and housing to provide life stabilization services and to address barriers to employment for those who are ready and able to work with such supports. Increase co-design of services with recipients.
  - b) Implement a new digital access benefit to pay for essential phone and internet equipment, and digital literacy training that will assist with using new digital tools and platforms.

- c) If you do keep the Reform of Employment Services pilot, ensure there is sufficient job training and that there are quality jobs that are long-term, stable and provide decent wages and meaningful work.

### **Investing in Access to Justice**

- **Recommendation #6 - Ensure timely adjudication of Tribunal matters:** Immediately fill adjudicator vacancies at the Social Benefits Tribunal and Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario with qualified and competent candidates to ensure timely and effective case hearings.
- **Recommendation #7 - Invest in Legal Aid Ontario:** Increase LAO funding to cover future potential shortfalls and develop a longer-term, structurally stable funding plan. This will support low-income Ontarians in accessing justice throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration of our submissions.

Sincerely,



**Devorah Kobluk**  
Senior Policy Analyst  
**Income Security Advocacy Centre**