



September 28, 2007

Ms. Cindy Wilkey
Income Security Advocacy Centre
425 Adelaide Street West, 5th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 3C1

Dear Ms. Wilkey:

Thank you for your organization's letter regarding the reduction of poverty in Ontario. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to you and your members, who tirelessly advocate on behalf of vulnerable Ontarians. By partnering with vital organizations like yours, Ontario Liberals have made significant progress in helping those in need across the province.

We have come a long way together in just four years, but there is much more to do. Ontario Liberals do not want to see our great province go backwards under the Conservatives. I am sure you will recall that, under the Conservative government, Ontario suffered disruption in our publicly funded schools, cuts to our health care system, and the neglect of our public services. The Conservatives downloaded the costs of public health, social housing, social assistance, ambulance services — and the costs of maintaining roads and bridges. They had dramatically reduced public school funding, and had cut \$220 million from GTA hospitals. They had also stopped funding the TTC. They believed that, by maligning Toronto, they could garner support throughout the rest of Ontario.

I am heartened that, after working with Ontarians for four short years, we have turned the corner. There are new resources, and a new spirit, in our publicly funded schools. We are training more doctors, hiring more nurses and building new and expanded hospitals. Our province has 340,000 more jobs than it had when we took office in 2003.

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Helping low-income families reach higher is not just a moral imperative, it is an economic necessity. Children — who are essential to the future of this province — are at the centre of the Ontario Liberal plan. This past spring, we brought in a new Ontario Child Benefit, which is helping 1.3 million children — children on social assistance and, for the first time, children in other low-income families. Already families are receiving \$250 annually per dependent child and that will grow to \$1,100 over the next four years, benefiting more than 600,000 low-income families.

In addition, Ontario Liberals have created over 22,000 new child care spaces, 35,000 housing allowances for low-income Ontarians, and have built nearly 20,000 new affordable housing units. We have also increased social assistance rates three times, and the minimum wage to \$8.00 an hour, the highest of any province in Canada — with the pledge of a further increase to \$10.25 by 2010. These increases follow a 1995 to 2002 freeze on the minimum wage at \$6.85 by the Conservatives.

Building on the results we have achieved over the last four years, we have an ambitious plan to expand opportunity for all Ontarians.

In publicly funded education, we will:

- Invest an additional \$3.1 billion annually by 2011 in our publicly funded education system.
- Expand the successful Pathways to Education program, giving more students from low-income families a fair shot at success.
- Double funding for our Community Use of Schools program, so that space for after-school activities is affordable for all Ontario families and free in communities that need it most.

For newcomers who are getting started, Ontario Liberals will:

- Ease their transition by creating a new Orientation Ontario course to help them start out on the right foot. We will augment the course by providing follow-up support through a call centre.
- Help newcomers upgrade their skills by expanding the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to include books, language courses and bridging programs.

- Give more newcomers Ontario job experience by expanding the Ontario Public Service Internship Program and mentoring partnerships with the private sector.

In tackling poverty and expanding opportunities for all Ontarians, we will:

- Build a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy around the Ontario Child Benefit. We will work with our partners to develop indicators and targets to measure and address child poverty. Our first step will be to support dental services for low-income Ontario families.
- Build on our first term successes in publicly funded education and the *Best Start* program by appointing an Early Learning Advisor to advise on developing and funding a full-day pre-school program, thereby relieving families of current day care costs.
- Create a long-term strategy for affordable housing together with our partners. We will ensure this strategy contains a mix of non-profit and co-operative housing and takes advantage of creative financing options.
- Join with financial institutions to create a new program to help low-income Ontarians build equity and save for a home, their own or their children's education, or to start their own business.
- Create a social venture capital fund at Social Innovation Generation@MaRS to find new solutions to difficult social problems.

The work we have accomplished together over the last four years — and our future progress — is at risk. The Conservatives are pledging to eliminate the health premium, which will take \$3 billion out of health care every year, and to divert \$500 million from publicly funded education to private religious schools.

Ontarians deserve better. Ontario Liberals understand that government has a responsibility to strengthen public services, not tear them apart in favour of private interests.

I believe we are at a watershed moment and that Ontarians have an important decision to make. By choosing Ontario Liberals on October 10, you are choosing to keep moving forward, together.

Ms. Wilkey, thank you again for your organization's letter. We hope to be able to count on the support of the Income Security Advocacy Centre so that we can continue to strengthen our province and improve quality of life.

Please accept my best wishes.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dalton McGuinty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
Premier