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ANOTHER YEAR WITH NO RELIEF: ONTARIO WORKS RECIPIENTS LEFT TO LIVE ON \$733 PER MONTH

TORONTO, ON – Social assistance rates for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients will increase today, but Ontarians struggling to get by on Ontario Works (OW) will see no increase to their social assistance incomes for the sixth year in a row.

The annual inflation-related increase to ODSP rates will raise the basic needs and maximum shelter allowances by 4.5%, bringing the combined base rate for individuals receiving ODSP to \$1368 per month. Other allowances such as the Special Diet Allowance, which is intended for recipients with medical or disability-related dietary restrictions, have not increased, despite exceptional increases in food costs. The benefit rate increase will not be applied to Ontario Works rates either: individuals receiving OW will continue to receive only \$733 per month for their housing, food, phone, transportation, clothing, and other basic needs.

“Because of inflation, individuals receiving \$733 in 2024 have much less purchasing power than they did in 2018,” said Asif Khan, Research and Policy Analyst at the Income Security Advocacy Centre. “To keep up with inflation alone, OW rates would have to be increased by over \$150 a month.” Khan added, “For the last six years, we’ve held out hope that the provincial government will listen to recipients and members of the public who have been calling for an increase to abysmally low social assistance rates, and every year we’ve been disappointed to see a zero per cent increase to OW rates.”

The government’s refusal to increase OW rates comes at a time when foodbank use across the province continues to rise at an alarming rate and nearly one in five households is experiencing food insecurity. The desperately low rates also have a disproportionate impact on single parents, who make up about 4% of the population in Ontario, but 28% of Ontario works cases, 90% of whom are women.

“Keeping rates low punishes single parents and children,” said Claudia Calabro, Community Organizer at the Income Security Advocacy Centre. “And if that’s not bad enough, those who can work are disincentivized by clawbacks that start to kick in after an individual earns more than \$200 in a month. It’s cruel.” Calabro added, “The fastest way to get Ontarians on stable ground is to increase OW rates and get rid of the punitive rules that trap them in poverty.”

-30-

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