

Peterborough Food Action Network

November 26, 2025

Hon. Michael Parsa

Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

7th Floor

438 University Ave.

Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Michael.parsaco@pc.ola.org

Re: Creating a Poverty Reduction Strategy where ALL Ontarians have what they need

Dear Minister Micheal Parsa,

Thank you for the opportunity to help shape the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy through the provincial consultation. We are writing on behalf of the Peterborough Food Action Network, whose vision is that everyone in Peterborough City and County will have enough healthy food to eat as part of a long-term food security strategy. PFAN brings together agencies and individuals to build community food security as part of local poverty reduction efforts. A community enjoys food security when:

- all people, at all times, have physical & economic access to nutritious, safe, personally and culturally appropriate foods,
- food is produced in ways that are environmentally sound, socially just, and promote community self-reliance, and
- food is provided in a manner that promotes human dignity.

We understand that the Government's approach to poverty reduction focuses on employment. **While having employment is a key component for addressing poverty for many people, we want to emphasize that people first need the stability of income security in order to be food secure and housing secure before realistically being able to access employment. Only when good jobs pay at least living wages can they help to address poverty.**

The first principle of the OPRS is "Person-centred: help individuals overcome barriers." Any effective strategy to reduce poverty needs to recognize the material barriers that impede employment. When people cannot afford the most basic of rent, adequate food, childcare, decent clothing for interviews, haircuts, and other essentials, then employment becomes unreachable.

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Income security

While we appreciate that your government has increased ODSP rates and indexed them to inflation, social assistance rates in Ontario are far from sufficient and have been punishingly low for too long. ODSP increased only 4.5% in July, 2024, and 2.8% in July, 2025. Ontario Child Benefit increased by about \$6 per child per month in July 2024 and about \$4 per month in July, 2025 (Income Security Advocacy Centre, 2025, 2024). Further, the sharp rise in household costs in recent years means that stagnant rates of OW rates over the last 7 years have actually decreased the value of these benefits.

In Peterborough, average market rent for a bachelor apartment cost \$956/month in 2024 and yet a single person on OW still only receives \$733/month for both shelter and basic needs (Income Security Advocacy Centre, 2025; United Way Peterborough & District, 2025;). A single person on ODSP receives \$1408. Neither of these are sufficient. Peterborough Public Healthⁱ (2024) determined that, after the costs of both housing and food are accounted for, a family of 4 living on Ontario Works in Peterborough has **negative \$66** and a single person on Ontario Works has **negative \$468** remaining for all other expenses. A single pregnant person on ODSP has **negative \$175**. These low rates force people into survival mode. When one's days and nights are consumed with finding food, staying warm, and having a place to sleep, then the added logistical, administrative, physical, social, and mental health demands of job searching can present formidable barriers.

We appreciate the Province's move to exempt the Canada Disability Benefit from OW and ODSP entitlements and its decision to raise the earnings exemption for ODSP recipients to \$1000 per month. It is important to also raise the OW earnings exemption to \$1000 per so that OW recipients are not penalized as they transition into paid employment.

Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity, a driver of physical and mental health challenges, is closely tied to income insecurity. 26.4%, more than a quarter of Ontario households, were food insecure in 2024. Relying on social assistance is associated with 316% greater odds of food insecurity after accounting for other socio-demographic and economic characteristics. Over half (52.8%) of households receiving any form of social assistance in Ontario experience food insecurity (Li et al., 2023).

The fact that the vast majority of food-insecure households rely primarily on wages/salary/self-employment income indicates that employment-based income is also

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not sufficient. While we appreciate the government's increases to minimum wage (now \$17.60), they still fall well short of a living wage. Living wage is the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and participate in their community. Our community, in the Eastern living wage region of Ontario, has a calculated living wage of \$22.20 (Ontario Living Wage Network, 2025). Across Ontario, living wage rates range from \$21.05 to \$27.20.

In summary, we recommend the following to strengthen income security, and to help address household food insecurity:

- Increase OW and ODSP rates to match the current cost of basic needs and index OW to inflation
- Raise the earnings exemption for OW to match that of ODSP
- Align minimum wage with living wage rates (minimum of \$21.05)

Good jobs with living wages are one important route to reducing poverty. This can be made possible by ensuring that minimum wages meet living wages and that people first have the stability of income security to allow for food security and housing security. **We call for all social assistance rates to be increased to meet the costs of living and indexed to inflation, for OW earnings exemptions to increase to match those of ODSP, and for minimum wage to be increased to meet living wages.**

We look forward to seeing how you will address our concerns.

Sincerely,

The Peterborough Food Action Network

www.foodinpeterborough.ca

Contact: Chair, Lauren Kennedy, MScFN, RD, CDE, lkennedy@lakelandsph.ca

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References

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ⁱ Now merged with Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit to become Lakelands Public Health.