

September 23, 2004

To: Community Services Committee

From: Commissioner, Community and Neighbourhood Services

Subject: Barriers Facing Clients Applying for and Receiving Ontario Works

Purpose:

This report is prepared in response to the presentation made to the Community Services Committee, September 9, 2004, by Toronto Social Services (TSS) entitled "Findings from Toronto Social Services' 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works." At that time, Committee members sought further information related to the key barriers single parents and other Ontario Works (OW) clients' face when applying for and receiving OW. To that end, a presentation addressing these barriers and issues will be provided to Committee at its October 7, 2004 meeting.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

"It is recommended that this report be received for information."

Comments:

At its meeting of September 9, 2004, the Community Services Committee discussed in detail a wide range of issues related to the findings of Toronto Social Services' 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works. The Committee's recommendations are provided in Attachment 1. The Commissioner has been directed to report on an action plan for the City of Toronto, including comprehensive recommendations that can be forwarded to senior levels of government to address the key issues identified in the report and subsequently discussed by Committee.

At the same time, in their discussions, Committee members noted the barriers that face single parents and other clients, both when they initially apply for assistance, and as they receive benefits on an ongoing basis. Unnecessary and arduous documentation and verification requirements were identified as obstacles that impact clients negatively and also consume significant staff time on activities that are not value-added and that divert staff from working more productively with clients.

In its reports on the changes to the social assistance system, TSS has previously identified important issues related to client service, and to the complexity and onerous administrative demands that are a feature of OW. The purpose of TSS' presentation will be to describe the application documentation and administrative processes, and highlight the impacts of these issues on clients and on the Division's ability to deliver services effectively. Addressing these basic service delivery issues will be an important component of the Commissioner's report that responds to Committee's recommendations for actions to assist single parents in poverty.

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List of Attachments:

Attachment 1: Community Services Committee Decision Document, Meeting 7, Item 10,
September 9, 2004

Attachment 1: Community Services Committee Decision Document, Meeting 7, Item 10, September 9, 2004

10. Toronto Social Services' 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works

Report 6, Other Items Clause

The Community Services Committee:

- (1) again deferred consideration of the report (June 14, 2004) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services until the October or November 2004 meeting of the Community Services Committee, with a request that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:**
 - (i) report further on:**
 - (a) a list of actions that the provincial and federal governments can take to address the growing permanent poor single-parent population that are not able to become self-supporting, through the lack of direction at the provincial and federal level, including what changes can be made to immigration policies that may help;**
 - (b) comprehensive recommendations that can be forwarded to both the provincial and federal governments;**
 - (c) possible incentive programs supported by the local, provincial and federal levels of government that could assist single parents on Ontario Works;**
 - (d) a pilot project that could be implemented, including a budget and expected financial support from both the provincial and federal governments; and**
 - (e) any research statistics on the budgeting choice difficulties of Toronto's Ontario Works families;**
 - (ii) immediately circulate the report (June 14, 2004) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and the report "Social Assistance & Social Exclusion: Findings from Toronto Social Services' 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works" to appropriate stakeholders for review, and that the comments and recommendations of these stakeholders be considered by staff prior to submission of the report requested in Recommendation (1)(i); and**
 - (iii) explore and report on reforms that have been initiated by other jurisdictions, including the United States, on programs that have had time limits imposed, and whether or not these programs have been successful; and**
- (2) tabled the following motion by Councillor Mammoliti until such time as the report requested is submitted:**

“That the Chair of the Community Services Committee, Councillor Mammoliti, and appropriate staff be requested to meet with the Federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to present the findings of the report “Social Assistance & Social Exclusion: Findings from Toronto Social Services’ 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works” regarding the challenges faced by immigrants living in poverty, especially single parents, and explore ways in which the federal government can assist.

Report (June 14, 2004) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services respecting the Toronto Social Services’ (TSS’) survey of single parents on Ontario Works (OW) in Toronto undertaken in August 2003.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the City advocate to the Province for Ontario Works program design and delivery changes to address issues identified in this report, including the need for a holistic approach to assisting clients facing multiple barriers to employment, the lack of program flexibility, the need for transitional and job retention supports, the lack of access to affordable, quality child care, and the inadequacy of benefit rates;
- (2) this report be forwarded to the Minister of Community and Social Services along with the research report, titled “Social Assistance and Social Exclusion: Findings from Toronto Social Services’ 2003 Survey of Single Parents on Ontario Works”; and
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.