



Councillor Joe Mihevc

Toronto City Hall
St. Paul's West
Ward 21

MEMORANDUM

To: Community Development and Recreation Committee

From: Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee

Date: June 18, 2007

Re: "Toronto for All" – Income Security

The Community Development and Recreation Committee, at the April 2, 2007 meeting, focused the agenda on Social Inclusion and launched an initiative referred to as "Toronto for All" – building a Toronto that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults.

As a first focus under "Toronto for All", a special meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee was held on May 3, 2007 in order to hear directly from City of Toronto residents and community stakeholders on issues related to income security.

We heard from a panel of three speakers with different perspectives – Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director of Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Hugh Mackenzie, Research Associate at the University of Toronto Centre for Urban Studies and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Finn Poschmann, Director of Research, C.D. Howe Institute. Following these speakers, we heard 16 deputations from the public, including 7 written submissions.

The following key issues were clearly expressed at the May 3 meeting:

There is a need to focus on:

- real employment opportunities for City residents – jobs that pay living wages and offer a way out of poverty;

- immediate increases to social assistance rates and benefits and the elimination of overly punitive eligibility criteria, processes and procedures;
- dental services and drug benefits for the poor, access to vitamins and health supplements and low cost nutritious food;
- other support services such as child care, affordable housing, recreation services, public transit and education;
- greater access to other income security programs such as Employment Insurance and the Ontario Disability Support Program; and
- particular issues facing newcomers, visible minorities and those residing within specific high needs communities.

There has been recent momentum on some income security measures, introduced in the 2007 federal and provincial budgets - a gradual increase to a \$10 minimum wage, the introduction of an Ontario Child Benefit and the federal Working Income Tax Benefit. These measures represent important first steps in the area of income security; however, what appears to be missing from the current political discourse is a clearly articulated framework from which to proceed.

Ultimately, what we heard on May 3rd was the strongly expressed belief that the City of Toronto should support the growing call for the articulation of a poverty reduction strategy at the Provincial order of government. This Strategy would be characterized by clear goals, targets, timelines and measures of success; with inter-related components including affordable child care, income security, affordable housing and effective and fair employment standards.

I am pleased to attach a summary backgrounder that reflects what was heard and provides an analysis of recent income security measures announced in the 2007 federal and provincial budgets. I make the following recommendations:

- (1) Consistent with Toronto Social Services' implementation of Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto, TSS, in conjunction with Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration, work with community agencies and organizations to host community education forums to advance public awareness regarding social inclusion and income security issues in Toronto;
- (2) The Chair of the CDRC and appropriate City Divisions and Agencies actively support community efforts to draw attention to the growing need for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy; and

- (3) This backgrounder and covering memo be forwarded to the Board of Health; Affordable Housing Office; Children's Services; City Manager's Office; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Social Services to provide valuable background information on the income security issues identified by city residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joe Mihevc". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "M".

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee