

Mayor
DAVID MILLER

May 8, 2007

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Room 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

The City of Toronto, through the leadership of the Community Development and Recreation Committee, is moving forward on its Social Inclusion agenda – to build a Toronto that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. There has been increasing concern about the effectiveness of one important component of social inclusion – income security measures, and a growing sense that wages and social programs are not providing income security for low income people in Toronto.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate your government on introducing a number of measures that will strengthen income security in the 2007 budget. The Ontario Child Benefit is a welcome step, and will provide additional benefits for all low-income families, whether on social assistance or working poor. An increase to the minimum wage is also an important support to working families and individuals, particularly in Toronto where the cost of living, specifically for housing and transportation, is the highest in the province. While both initiatives are noteworthy, the realities facing many low income people in our city dictate greater urgency with respect to how rapidly implementation proceeds.

We would also like to take this opportunity to communicate the importance of another income security measure discussed at the March 2007 meeting of Toronto City Council – the cost of nutritious food for people living on social assistance.

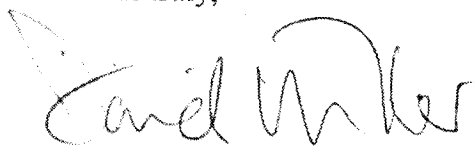
Adequate nutritious food is a basic requirement for health and well-being. Toronto's Medical Officer of Health has reported that many Toronto residents, notably those on social assistance, have great difficulty in meeting their daily nutritional needs due to inadequate incomes and high housing costs. Toronto City Council therefore, requests the Province of Ontario to increase social assistance benefit rates so that the Basic Allowance includes a nutrition allowance which meets daily nutritional needs as determined annually by the Nutritious Food Basket. We also request that the Province of Ontario publish annually the details of current social assistance rate components and how they are determined, including the nutrition allowance portion of the Basic Allowance. For your information a brief report on the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket, from the Toronto Medical Officer of Health, has been attached.



Income security is an acute issue in a large, diverse city like Toronto, where there are large numbers of vulnerable and low income people, a high cost of living and growing evidence that poverty is concentrating in specific communities and neighbourhoods. Having taken what are laudable first steps, we urge your government to move quickly to fully implement the efforts outlined in the 2007 budget – by accelerating plans to increase the minimum wage, by ensuring low income families receive the maximum benefits through the OCB as soon as possible and by introducing increases to social assistance rates to reflect the nutrition allowance based on the Food Basket Measure.

Strengthening income security is an essential part of achieving our vision of a great city with prosperity, liveability and opportunity for all. Thank you for consideration of this important matter.

Yours truly,



Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto



Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development & Recreation
Committee

- c. Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hon. Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion
Dr. David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto