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The Alliance for a Poverty-free Toronto met for three years, both in small monthly working groups and in biannual wider check-ins with allies and advocates in the childcare, food housing, labour, social assistance and poverty sectors, to push for a municipal strategy to fight poverty, which is what you have before you today for consideration.

As you know from the stories of your constituents, from the many published reports, and the statements heard here today, poverty is a desperate, sad thing. It damns us all, hurts some of us much more. Single mothers face twice the poverty rate of couples with children. New immigrants, First Nations people and People of Colour find the labour and housing markets exclude them in very similar and harsh ways. Youth now enter a re-shaped labour market with limited prospects for success. People are travelling further in Toronto for poorer jobs, bad food and scarce housing. These are terrible awful things which you well know.

So, then, as the great Torontonians Ursula Franklin reminded us, "after you have finished awfulizing, then what?"

That answer is up to us. APT has produced a report, delivered to you all last fall, which first builds a strong evidence base and then a call to action. This second half of the report offers some possibilities for the conversation which is about to begin. In it you will find very specific recommendations for some of the 'wicked' problems which face low income people.

The APT report, *Towards a Poverty Elimination Strategy for the City of Toronto*, calls for actions in the areas of:

1. *Employment* (e.g. living wage policy, stronger employment equity, paid internships for youth and newcomers, advocacy for a provincial/national jobs strategy)
2. *Income support* (advocacy for more adequate provincial income support programs and improved access to Employment Insurance)
3. *Housing* (address provincial wait list, TCHC repairs, inclusionary zoning, upgrade shelter services, enhance Housing Stabilization Fund)

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4. *Transit* (increased operating support for TTC, barring fare hikes, discounting transit passes for low-income residents, advocacy for adequate provincial funding)
5. *Community Services* (increased access to mental health, addictions, disability supports; better funding for non-profit and community organizations, better access to affordable child care)

We also offered a few broad recommendations:

- The first is that a coordinated approach is needed. These problems are complex and intertwined and so one-off solutions will not work.
- The second is that a poverty lense has to be used on every decision brought before Council – will this make poverty better or worsen it? How can any decision improve the lot of those without?

But I want to also offer a warning from other places. It seems now, even at this meeting, that Strategies are sexy, the new way for governments to respond, to demonstrate their commitment to action. Last week the Director of Poverty at the Rowntree Foundation in the U.K. posted a cynical blog post about a new Child Poverty strategy. A strategy has to be more than priorities, but connect to specific targets and spark action; otherwise it is simply window-dressing. So be warned, that this new strategy cannot be that. The details are important.

The time for action is now. Why? Here's why:

In an anecdote about his childhood, Mayor Nenshi explains the difference a city can make. He explained, that while he was from a low income family, they were not poor. The library with any book he wanted was up the street, the City pool was down and around the corner. Downtown was an easy transit ride away. He enjoyed a daily school snack program (something particularly poignant in Toronto given the recent testimony by a pediatric nutritionist on how the school snack program saved Jeffrey Baldwin's sister from starvation).

Poverty is not inevitable, but it is a choice, of our own economic and social priorities. Today you have a chance to make a bigger change. Do so. Make it real.