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**Deputation on Policy Framework for Toronto Transit Fare Equity
City of Toronto Executive Committee
July 2, 2014**

I am speaking on behalf of St. Stephen's Community House today. I am a Settlement Assistant in the Wellness Promotion Program. We work with pregnant women in different locations in the City of Toronto.

Our agency has been working with program participants for more than four years on the need for affordable transit fares. Four years ago, we joined the Fare Fair Coalition. Our goal is to obtain a reduced fare for people who live in poverty. In our programs, participants identify the high cost of transit as a huge barrier in their lives.

As a Settlement Assistant, I hear stories on a daily basis of families struggling to take care of their basic needs. They face cost barriers trying to get to work, take their kids to appointments, do grocery shopping and even go to a food bank. This is because they do not have extra money for high TTC fares. When you have a family, TTC fares are extremely high. It is not just one fare you need to pay, but multiple fares. For a family of four, that could cost more than \$20 a day. You can't leave your children at home, and can't afford to pay someone to look after them. Parents scrape together money for TTC fares, and forgo things like food.

I know many families who do not eat three meals a day, and parents who regularly forgo meals so their children can eat. When people go hungry, we know they do not sleep as well or perform at their best at work. These families are hard working and trying to lift themselves out of poverty. But when they do not have affordable public transit, it makes this goal that much more difficult to reach. Offering reduced fares to low income people would have tremendous positive affects in the lives of so many, and give them a fighting chance to improve their lives.

Newcomers in our English language LINC programs report they must walk long distances in winter, often in poor footwear, because they can't afford the \$3 plus to take TTC.

Corner Drop-in users often walk much of the day, to obtain food. This is an extreme problem for people who receive Ontario Works. They have no

money left for transit fares or food. Often people go hungry, as their fatigue and impaired health makes it hard to walk far to obtain food.

Food costs are going up, by 100 per cent for some items. This is just in the past one and a half years. People need cheaper transit to be able to shop at low-cost food stores.

People who work for minimum wage report they can't afford the \$6 a day to get to and from work. They cut corners on food and other basic needs to try to pay for expensive TTC fares. We urge you to include this group in your discussions about transit fare equity.

We are pleased the City is studying this issue. This is good timing, as the City is embarking on a Poverty Reduction Strategy. With a low-income fare or pass, people will be able to engage more in society, by being able to attend medical appointments, job search and find and keep paid work. Transit equity can thus lead to reduced government costs as people maintain their health and engage in productive activities more easily.

St. Stephen's Community House spends more than \$45,000 a year on TTC tokens and tickets for our participants. This is a tiny fraction of what people have to spend to get out to appointments. One of the top reasons people come to our locations is to find TTC tokens for urgent travel needs. We often have to say no because we can't afford to give tokens to everyone. In a November 2014 deputation, our seniors supported the TTC Riders in their request that the City of Toronto budget pay more for TTC. We also want the Ontario Government to fund the TTC more to help reduce fares for low-income users. It is not fair that riders have to pay most of the costs of the TTC.

We note that other GTA municipalities are helping pay the transit costs of low-income riders. This includes York Region, where low-income riders get a 75 per cent discount and Halton Region where people get a 50 per cent discount.

Toronto is known for being a leader in equity issues. We want you to step up and take leadership on this issue. The development of a policy framework by the end of 2015 leaves people paying higher fares for some time. We also understand that some implementation will not happen until the 2017 budget cycle. This leaves people in poverty struggling with high

fares for some time. We request that you move this item up, so it is dealt with sooner.

We urge you to include people with lived experience of poverty as stakeholders in policy framework development sessions. St. Stephen's is pleased to work with our participants in such a process.

Thank you.

Personal story from Marcelina Gonzalez Rodriguez
Settlement Assistant, Wellness Promotion Program
St. Stephen's Community House

When I arrived as a newcomer to Toronto, I wanted to volunteer at Syme Woolner Community Centre, to improve my language skills. I did not have a work permit at that time, and my savings were not enough to pay for TTC fares. So I would walk to this location three times a week. This took me a total of 60 to 80 minutes both ways. I walked no matter what kind of weather we were having. It was not easy, but I had no choice because the cost of the fare was too high for me. I am sure that many people would be pleased to volunteer their time, but they have to think twice when it comes to the high cost of public transit.