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Budget Committee - Due to the Snow Storm

From: Ian Edward <IEdward@believeinkids.ca>
To: "buc@toronto.ca" <buc@toronto.ca>
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CC: Juliet John-Baptiste <jjohn-baptiste@torontohydro.com>

**Deputation – City of Toronto Budget 2015
 Middle Childhood Matters Coalition**

February 2nd, 2015

As a parent in the City of Toronto whose daughter attends an After School Program at the Toronto Kiwanis Boys & Girls Clubs (a member of the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition) – I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you today.

On behalf of the Coalition I would like to thank the City of Toronto for taking bold steps in advancing the wellbeing of children and families in this City. We read about the elimination of TTC fares for children 12 and under, which would allow parents, community groups, and schools to take children out to more recreational programs and trips, without worrying about the cost of transportation. The City of Toronto has also recently announced a Poverty Reduction Strategy, in which child poverty is highlighted as a main area of concern.

According to a CAS report, 29% of children in this city live in poverty. In some areas such as Regent Park and Thorncliffe Park the number can be as high as 50%. So saying children live in poverty is just another way of saying families are living in poverty. Across the City of Toronto we know that poverty is increasing, especially in the inner city suburbs of Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke/Rexdale. We also know that female-headed households such as mine, bear the brunt of this burden. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, 80% of single-parent families are led by women, which amounts to around 1 million families. 21% of single mothers are low-income, compared to only 7% of single fathers.

In light of this information, we feel that the following items in the budget are cause for concern:

- No increase to children's services, no mention of increases in subsidized childcare spots despite growing waitlists, only one new childcare Centre will be opened this year.
- No additional money for the Student Nutrition Program, other than to cover the constantly increasing costs of food and programming. I have seen first hand from spending time at Boys & Girls Club in Regent Park how important this is.

Access to quality and affordable childcare is absolutely instrumental for families to escape the cycle of poverty. Being able to put your children in daycare or in a quality out of school program means both parents can earn a living wage, with increased income that can better support the emotional, intellectual and social development of their children. Unfortunately a lot of Single mothers end up in part-time, shift-based, casual work arrangements, with wages that do not allow them to pay for babysitters, or schedules that allow them to use day-time only children's services. We need more subsidized childcare spots, and more flexible children's out of school services; not less.

Furthermore, families living in financial hardship often cannot provide adequate, nutritious food to their children. A 2013 study found 21% of children in Toronto rely on food banks, and go hungry at least one or two days a week. This has a devastating impact on children's mental and physical development, and leads to long-term illness and disability, outcomes that we must all consider as part of the social determinants of health. This is why the coalition feels that the Student Nutrition Program plays a vital role in combating the effect of poverty on children, and is an area where much more investment is called for.

The Middle Childhood Matter Coalition, is concerned about children ages 6-12 and the ability for their parents to access barrier free quality out of school time programs. This is a crucial period in which we see children form their individual identities, and reach key milestones in their physical, social and academic development. How well

children succeed in their middle years can determine their early teen experiences and can define a young person for life. We want to ensure that children have as strong as possible a foundation to start from. We ask the City of Toronto to work with the province to boost investment in our future, and truly make a meaningful impact on the next generation of Torontonians through the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Thank you.

Juliet John-Baptiste

Parent