

October 15, 2015  
Attention Executive Committee  
City of Toronto, 10th floor, West Tower, City Hall  
100 Queen St W, Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

**Re: TO Prosperity: Poverty Reduction Strategy**

I am writing to commend Toronto City Council for committing to implement a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, and to advocate for that strategy to move forward.

In my role at CivicAction and as a member of the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy Advisory Group, I've seen first-hand the need for a more intentional and coordinated approach to ensuring all our residents have the means to enjoy a healthy and meaningful life with access to all that our prosperous city has to offer.

We appreciate that the City is feeling the pressure of many unfunded or underfunded priorities, from aging infrastructure to social services to affordable housing to maintaining our city's green spaces. But ultimately it's the faces of poverty and the people who are struggling who need to figure prominently in the City's priority setting. Just as important as the actions recommended in TO Prosperity is the way in which City government makes decisions going forward. I applaud the commitment to ensure that the impact of budget choices on levels of poverty is considered, and that equity impacts of decisions are considered in day-to-day planning and decision-making.

As this month's Vital Signs report by the Toronto Foundation showed, access to opportunity is increasingly out of reach for too many. Income inequality among Toronto's households is growing at twice the national average, and Toronto is now the nation's capital of working poverty. The impact of these figures was underscored at CivicAction's 2015 [Summit](#) in April where we brought close to 1000 people together to tackle the big challenges and opportunities facing the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. One of our five themes shone a spotlight on the First 1000 Days of life - from when a woman becomes pregnant to the child's second birthday – and the critical impact of those days on child development and adult life.

Research shows that income inequality can greatly impact our ability to give our child the nutrition, physical activity, outdoor time, and socializing and nurturing they need to set them up for success. Families with lower socioeconomic status have access to fewer social supports, recreational areas, and resources including safe, clean, affordable housing, and nutritious food. The fact that one in every four children is living in poverty in Toronto is a chilling reality and, in many cases, has irreversible implications for the rest of their lifetimes.

There are clear and compelling steps to address this situation that the Strategy lays out, including increasing the support and funding for more childcare, expanding the offering of nutritious food in City-run and supported programs, and better assisting low-income and vulnerable residents to access child care spaces and fee subsidies.

True to the CivicAction model of multi-sector collaboration, we are pleased the Strategy calls for a commitment from all sectors to move forward together. The Strategy's proposal to work with the private and public sectors to create effective paths to good careers for low-income youth builds on the good work the City is already doing and the broader work CivicAction has undertaken with its Escalator: Jobs for Youth Facing Barriers initiative. These efforts are making the job market more transparent and giving networks to youth who currently don't have them.

We also applaud the sentiment of governments working collaboratively to succeed. A number of neighbouring municipalities are showing leadership on developing their own poverty reduction strategies, and we encourage Toronto to collaborate with them and the Province as you move forward with this one.

I'll conclude by urging the Executive Committee and City Council to approve the TO Prosperity: Poverty Reduction Strategy, and to build on your base operating funding commitment with funds dedicated to the annual work plan in your next budget cycle. Through political will and collective leadership, we look forward to seeing this strategy become a reality that gives everyone a fair chance to thrive in this great city of ours.

Sincerely,



Sevaun Palvetzian  
Chief Executive Officer