

EX9.5.14

Because children depend on all of us

Administration/
Communications
f 416.324.2485

Child & Family
Disclosure Unit
EAHS
f 416.324.2509

Child and
Youth Services
f 416.324.2500

Community
Development &
Prevention Program
f 416.324.2489

Finance
f 416.324.2373

Human Resources
f 416.324.2400

Information
Services
f 416.324.2510

Intake
f 416.324.2181

Legal Services
f 416.324.2550

Medical/Dental &
Psychological Services
f 416.324.2508

Quality Assurance,
Systems Support &
Record Services
Department
f 416.324.2424

Toronto Branch
f 416.324.2555

Volunteer Services
f 416.324.2489

October 19, 2015

Ms. Jennifer Forkes
Clerk, Executive Committee
City of Toronto
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2
Email: exc@toronto.ca

Re: Comments for 2015.EX9.5 on October 20, 2015 Executive Committee to be added to agenda and circulated

Dear Mayor and Executive Committee Members:

I want to congratulate you, and the entire City Council of Toronto, for supporting the development of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy for our city.

Your unanimous vote to launch the strategy in April of 2014 and your strong vote to adopt the Interim Strategy in July of this year have sent a strong and important message: We can all get together on reducing poverty because doing so benefits all of us.

On behalf of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, I encourage you now to unanimously adopt the city's final poverty reduction strategy and to move ahead promptly with its implementation by making poverty reduction a top priority in the city's 2016 Budget.

Last week, there was widespread media coverage of a report on child poverty in Toronto that was co-authored by our organization. The report indicates that Toronto has the highest level of child poverty of large cities in Canada. Twenty-nine percent of Toronto children – 144,000 children - are living on incomes below the Low Income Measure After Tax (\$33,000 a year for a family of 2 adults and 2 children).

Our report also shows that there is massive inequity in children's economic situations: child poverty rates at the neighbourhood-level range from under 5% to over 60%. Children in Toronto's most diverse neighbourhoods are four times

more likely to be living in poverty than children in the city's least diverse neighbourhoods.

The experience of poverty hurts children and their life chances. Children living in poverty start school less ready to learn, have less access to extracurricular activities, and are less likely to succeed at school. Children living in poverty are also more likely to be neglected or maltreated, in many cases because parents – through no fault of their own - are simply not able to provide for their children's needs.

So what can be done? Lots.

Child poverty levels are, in large part, the result of political choices. In countries like Denmark and Finland child poverty rates are below 4%; in Toronto the rate is seven times higher. Through a strong poverty reduction strategy, the United Kingdom reduced Child poverty by 40% between the mid-1990s and 2010.

Four action steps are needed to reduce Toronto's unacceptably high poverty rates.

First, political leaders (at all levels of government) need to state clearly and publicly a) that it is unacceptable for almost one in three children to be growing up in poverty in Toronto and b) that they are committed to changing this situation.

Mayor Tory has said this a few times. We need all Councillors to say it – to constituents, to their supporters, to the media, and to community leaders.

Second, the all levels of government need to develop coherent, comprehensive and complimentary plans to reduce poverty. The #TO Prosperity plan which is before you is a very good start. It includes many actions that have been proven to be effective in reducing poverty in other cities, including:

- City leadership in implementing a living wage
- The leveraging of city spending on infrastructure and services to create jobs in low-income neighbourhoods
- The expansion of affordable housing through better zoning, enforcement and investment
- The improvement of access to public transit through a reduced fare transit pass for low-income residents
- The expansion of subsidized child care

Research has shown that all of these investments pay back in reduced health care, justice and social services costs many times over.

The **third** step is to set a specific target for progress in reducing poverty . In 2013, Calgary set a goal of reducing poverty by 50% in 10 years. Edmonton has committed to eradicate poverty in a generation. Toronto's strategy lacks a clear and compelling target that you – and we – can rally the public behind.

The **final** step is to commit to the sustained, long-term investment needed to significantly reduce poverty – starting now.

Toronto's 2015 budget was a good start. Poverty reduction was named as a clear priority with an investment of \$26M in city dollars for new and enhanced initiatives.

But as Mayor Tory said at that time, that was just a start.

Now that the final poverty reduction plan is completed, it's essential that you begin implementation promptly by making poverty reduction one of the top priorities in the 2016 budget, and by continuing to build on and expand the city's investment that was started last year.

Furthermore, in 2016, the city needs to work to identify a dedicated long-term revenue source to allow a sustained investment commitment to the city's 20-year poverty reduction strategy starting with the 2017 Budget.

That's the only way to ensure that the strategy is not subject to the vicissitudes of political motivation.


Reducing child poverty should be and can be above political debate: I have yet to meet a politician who wants to increase child poverty.

I urge you to make Toronto a vibrant, inclusive city of opportunity for all.

Hundreds of community members have stepped forward over the past year to share their personal stories and struggles and pain.

The ball is now in your court.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blair Boddy', with a stylized, cursive script.

Blair Boddy,
Director, Internal Resources
Children's Aid Society of Toronto