



To: Executive Committee December 1, 2016

From: Kimberly Lansdowne, Community Engagement and Program Coordinator, MTML

Re: **2016.EX20.10a Fair Pass – Transit Fare Equity Program for Low-Income Torontonians**

Good afternoon Mayor Tory and councillors,

My name is Kimberly, I am the Community Engagement and Program Coordinator at the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML). Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on how the proposed Transit Fare Equity Program for Low-Income Torontonians will impact the people we support.

MTML is a regional network that supports Literacy and Basic Skills programs in Toronto and York Region. Together these adult learning programs serve over 10,000 learners each year – most of whom rely on transit to attend programs and go about their daily life.

Literacy providers in Toronto work with some of the most vulnerable members of our community, the majority of whom live on low-incomes and face a multitude of barriers when it comes to accessing services. For this reason we are excited that the Transit Fare Equity Program for Low-Income Torontonians being considered today allows us to join other progressive jurisdictions including Ottawa, Kingston, Hamilton, Guelph, Mississauga, Halton Region, York Region and Calgary amongst others who offer equitable transit fares to those in need.

Adult learners come to our programs from all walks of life, and despite the many obstacles they may face, they choose a literacy program with the simple goal of improving their literacy in order to improve their outcomes in life. They may be recently unemployed; returning to education because of interruption in schooling due to violence or other trauma; are often supporting their families while studying; and while some receive social assistance, many more are amongst the poorest workers in our city. Their struggles are real and literacy providers work side-by-side to help them reach their goals. As trusted service providers we hear of the daily challenges they face.

I have personally worked with a learner who struggled to pay the transit fares required to attend job interviews when he was ready to re-enter the workforce; a senior learner who was making tough choices between groceries and transit when she had a number of doctor's appointments to attend one month; a young mom who would walk a great distance to pick-up her child from daycare after our session in order to save her fare for the next leg of her journey with her young daughter.

We are glad to know that your report found that available and affordable public transit can effectively reduce poverty through increased access to social and health services, community resources, and economic opportunities. However, adult learners in literacy programs do not currently receive a discounted 'student' rate, and in most cases will wait the longest to benefit from the 4-year roll-out of the recommendations in this report. There are also many older workers in adult learning programs, and low-income seniors' needs are not adequately addressed in these recommendations.

Access to the written word

Today we stand united with the Toronto Drop-In Network, Young Parents No Fixed Address, LGBTQ Service Providers Network and the Fair Fare Coalition to say thank you for recognizing the desperate need for a 'Fair Pass' in our diverse city. It is a first step towards transit equity, but the timelines and the eligibility criteria do not go far enough to allow people to truly get ahead.

We along with many others are urging you to consider a free pass for people on social assistance and a \$50 monthly pass for low-income workers. As well as needs-based fares for low-income seniors and students who attend adult learning programs.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of ways to make transit accessible and equitable in our city.