

Comments to add to Agenda item EC21.2
for the meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee on April 27, 2021
by Claude Wittmann

Please make these comments available online. Thank you.

1) Social assistance rates:

Social assistance recipients live drastically under the poverty line in a system that is punitive (see "[Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#)" (2017)), has been called upon by the 2019 United Nations' Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and cost this City in other services. Our dignity is breaking. The Canadian Medical Association has published that 50% of our health is socially determined (2013); doctors in Toronto attest that our health is affected; housing workers are burning out in the face of our housing precarity.

The current Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal (SARR) plans no raise of rate, but instead to "wrap-us-up" with "life stabilization" services. It is structurally violent to suggest that our lives could be stabilized at \$733/month on OW or \$1,169/month on ODSP, even more so in the middle of a pandemic that has strained the job market and definitely not made it more accessible to us, and while our earnings are still clawed back at a rate of 50% over the low threshold of \$200/month or at a rate of 100% when they come through EI or CRB. MCSS has spared hundreds of millions of dollars by clawing back on the CERB and CRB without reinvesting this money in those who need it. How low can we go?

This Committee's Recommendation 3 addresses the problem of rates with a reassuring reference to the structural violence, but it does not reflect the reality as is. We urgently need a substantial raise of rates and yes, a structure for these rates that makes it impossible for MCSS to cut the allowances of people who lose their shelter. But, our current provincial government belongs to the long line of PC authorities proudly seduced by blaming, pathologizing and shaming the poor and it has been 36 years since a PC government increased social assistance rates while, as you know, they did not shy away from slashing them as the Mike Harris government in 1995 and the Ford government did 2018, besides cancelling the Ontario Basic Income pilot project. In real terms, social assistance recipients are now poorer than they were in 1998, just after ODSP and OW replaced FBA. This Committee needs to be bolder.

In its [Interim Shelter Recovery Report](#), Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) recommended that City Council ask that the Provincial Government

Improve housing and health stability by increasing social assistance rates to match the level of income support available through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

The CERB felt like a basic income, with the dignity that comes with it, especially for people with disabilities. In that respect, please be cognizant also of the recent recommendation by the [British Columbia Expert Panel on Basic Income](#) (2020) to implement a basic income for people living with a disability. On page 399 of their report, they say: "We see the combined set of our recommendations as amounting to establishing a basic income for people living with a disability, setting their guarantee level to above the poverty line. This basic income would by no means be the sum total of what would be done for people living with disabilities—it would be complemented with a set of services and supports described in our other recommendations. To repeat a recurrent theme, we see these recommendations as suggestions for starting a focused conversation that must include the community of people with disabilities."

For a lot of ODSP recipients, the dignity that comes with a basic income is way more effective in enabling us to find our paths and employers than wrap-around services that only rarely can match the subtlety needed to re-balance our health, sleep, food intake, housing, social validation, community involvement, employment, life.

Please amend Recommendation 3 to reflect SSHA's consultation with individuals with lived experience and service providers, and their recommendation that social assistance rates be increased to the level of the Canada Emergency Recovery Benefit (CERB).

2) Principles

The current Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal and the Employment Services Transformation are wrapped in a discourse of support and "modernization", but, given the track record of our current government on downgrading if not erasing its responsibilities and accountability procedures regarding systemic poverty and the marginalization of people with disabilities, it is hard to not see the potential for illegitimate assessments (ex CAT2), more control, more surveillance, more punishing practices and more erosion of our right to an adequate standard of living (even when not working or working part-time) and our right to self-determination (especially when looking for work). These are human rights defined by the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR) that Canada acceded to in 1976 and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability](#) (CRPD) that Canada ratified in 2010 and joined the optional protocol of in 2018.

I suggest to adjust the proposed principles so that they reflect this City's human-rights-based approach:

- a. **respect clients' human right to self-determination**
- b. **prioritize clients' well-being and progression according to their own standards and assessments**
- c., d. (no comment)
- e. **adequate and sustainable funding (erase "to drive best outcomes")**
- f. **recognize the barriers that clients face** and promote local economic and social inclusion

Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

Claude Wittmann, ward of Joe Cressy