

City Hall Presentation – Discretionary Benefits

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Thank you for the opportunity today to address the paper Efforts to Mitigate Funding Pressure to Discretionary Benefits. As you know, my name is Elizabeth McGuire and I am the Chair of the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits. I am here today representing those who are unable to be here or unable speak for themselves.

We were here last year, when council wrestled with this downward pressure from the Province and succeeded in finding the money to continue Discretionary Benefits for another year. And we thank the staff and councillors who worked last year and are working this year to continue to care for those on the lowest rung of the economic ladder until these costs can be uploaded to the Province.

And your recommendation that benefits awarded recipients of OW and ODSP be extended to low income people as well is good news for people, like me, who live on a small pension and have no benefits whatsoever.

Whereas those with little understanding of Discretionary Benefits may disagree with any benefits awarded all low income benefits, those among us close to the system and low income persons know, unequivocally the direct affect Discretionary Benefits have on a persons health and their preparedness for work.

The market remains in an economic slump, jobs are few, and Hamilton has lost a large part of its tax base. However, keeping our lowest-income people healthy will mitigate long term health care costs and ensure they are ready to return to work if and when the economy does improve and employers return to Hamilton.

May I leave you with two points I would like to make?

1. Please stop referring to it as a Hydro benefit when it is much more indentured servitude to Hamilton hydro. One person on the Campaign applied for help with her largest than normal hydro bill and ended up losing \$150 from her cheque monthly. This act takes away her Special Diet and her Transportation for medical appointments and can hardly be called a BENEFIT. Please call it what it is: hydro debit. That does not count as help!

2. Tens of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars can be saved locally and provincially with a change in the delivery model of social assistance from the "Surveillance Model" which is, to my mind, the most expensive of all delivery models that could be employed for the delivery of social assistance. Councillors and staff struggle within the framework of that expensive 'surveillance model' to operate within means; and yet, a change in models, would free up tens of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars. Yes, this is a Provincial issue. But a change is necessary and long overdue. The multi-city forum last December realized success. Why not do it again, only this time focus on the delivery model. Once everyone understands just how expensive is this model, instituted during the reign of terror of Mike Harris, we feel there would be broad support for this change.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.