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Hamilton

Hamilton
Best Start★

Hamilton
Meilleur départ★

Board of Health
 City of Hamilton
 77 Main Street West
 Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

November 13, 2015

RE: Food Insecurity Strategy

Dear Members of the Board of Health,

On behalf of the Basic Needs Work Group a subcommittee of the Hamilton Best Start Network, this letter is to support the recommendations of Public Health Services to the Board of Health on November 16, 2015, pertaining to the Food Insecurity Strategy.

The mandate of the Hamilton Best Start Network, a community collaborative of over 50 organizations working together for ten years, is to promote the wellbeing of children and families prenatal to twelve years by supporting them to reach their full potential. This is being accomplished through collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring and influencing policy. The goal of the Basic Needs Work Group is to take a holistic approach to determine the steps needed to minimize the gap for families requiring basic needs in Hamilton and build the capacity of frontline staff through:

- Creating indicators to measure what is being done to help people who are living on low incomes
- Assessing what services are available
- Assessing what services are being accessed
- Assessing the awareness of what is available
- Developing equitable services and supports to meet the needs by neighbourhood
- Empowering citizens to become engaged in the decision making that influences change within their neighbourhoods.

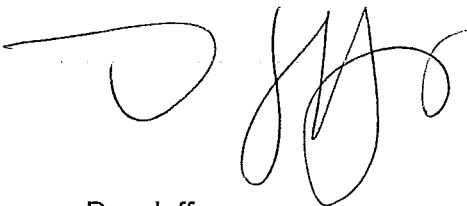
The Basic Needs Work Group is very aware of the significant needs facing Hamilton's children and families. Twenty-six percent of children under 6 and twenty-three percent of all those under 18 are living in poverty (from census data Statistics Canada). The Early Development Index (EDI), a measure of young children's vulnerability, shows Hamilton's young children are more at risk compared to those across Ontario. In 2011, 11.6% of Hamilton families faced food insecurity and had insufficient income for their family's needs. This is a result of a variety of reasons: social assistance barely covers families' accommodation and food costs; minimum wage does not provide sufficiently for a family to live; two wage earners are needed to make ends meet while many families are headed by lone parents; and work is precarious. Children living in these conditions are subject to a great deal more stress than those living in affluent and stable conditions, which is now known to lead to greater mental illness and poor health.

Recent research on the impact of health inequalities indicates that disadvantage starts in childhood and accumulates through life. To make improvements in the lives of Hamilton's children and families, factors that determine health and wellbeing, such as income and housing, need to be considered to ensure long-lasting change. For these reasons the Basic Needs Work Group strongly endorses the recommendations of Public Health Services:

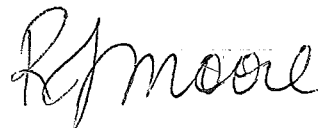
- (1) Advocate for an investigation into a basic income guarantee for Ontarians and all Canadians.
- (2) Request an update on the transformation of social assistance in Ontario noting that currently, social assistance rates do not reflect the actual costs of nutritious food and adequate housing.
- (3) Request an increase to the funding allocation for affordable housing to the City of Hamilton, noting that current funding to Hamilton under the Investment in Affordable Housing Extension is insufficient to meet the needs identified in the City's 10-Year Housing & Homelessness plan.
- (4) Endorse a Living Wage for Hamilton to increase income security and reduce health inequities.

Investing in improvements to basic income, social assistance, affordable housing, and ensuring a Living Wage for all will reduce the vulnerability of children and families and produce lasting benefits to the whole community. The Basic Needs Work Group looks forward to using these recommendations to inform its work and collaborating with community partners to achieve better outcomes for children and families in Hamilton.

Sincerely,



Don Jaffray
Basic Needs Work Group Co-Chair
Executive Director, Social Planning
and Research Council



Rachelle Moore
Basic Needs Work Group Co-Chair
Early Years Project Manager,
City of Hamilton