

PRESENTATION TO
EMERGENCY & COMMUNITY SERVICES
COMMITTEE

1:30 p.m. Feb. 20, 2020
Council Chambers

Sally Palmer, McMaster Community
Poverty Initiative

INTRODUCTION

People who have to survive on
current rates of social assistance are in
CRISIS
because of Inflation and
Government inaction

GOAL OF OUR VISIT TO YOUR COMMITTEE

- The MCPI is asking you to support a motion to have the Mayor write to the Premier and relevant Ministers, such as Children, Community & Social Services, Finance, and Health
- The letter would urge them to make a substantial increase to social assistance rates, to compensate for giving no increase in 2019
- 2019 was a year of high inflation to food prices in Ontario

INFLATION WITH NO GOVERNMENT RESPONSE IN 2019 LED TO A CRISIS FOR ONTARIANS DEPENDENT ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Food prices increased by 7.6%: this was the biggest annual increase in a decade (Report by Toronto Medical Officer of Health to Toronto Board of Health, October 16, 2019)
- The effects of inflation on people dependent on social assistance have been ignored by the government
- They have given no cost-of-living increase in 2019.

HOW MUCH DOES HEALTHY EATING COST IN HAMILTON?

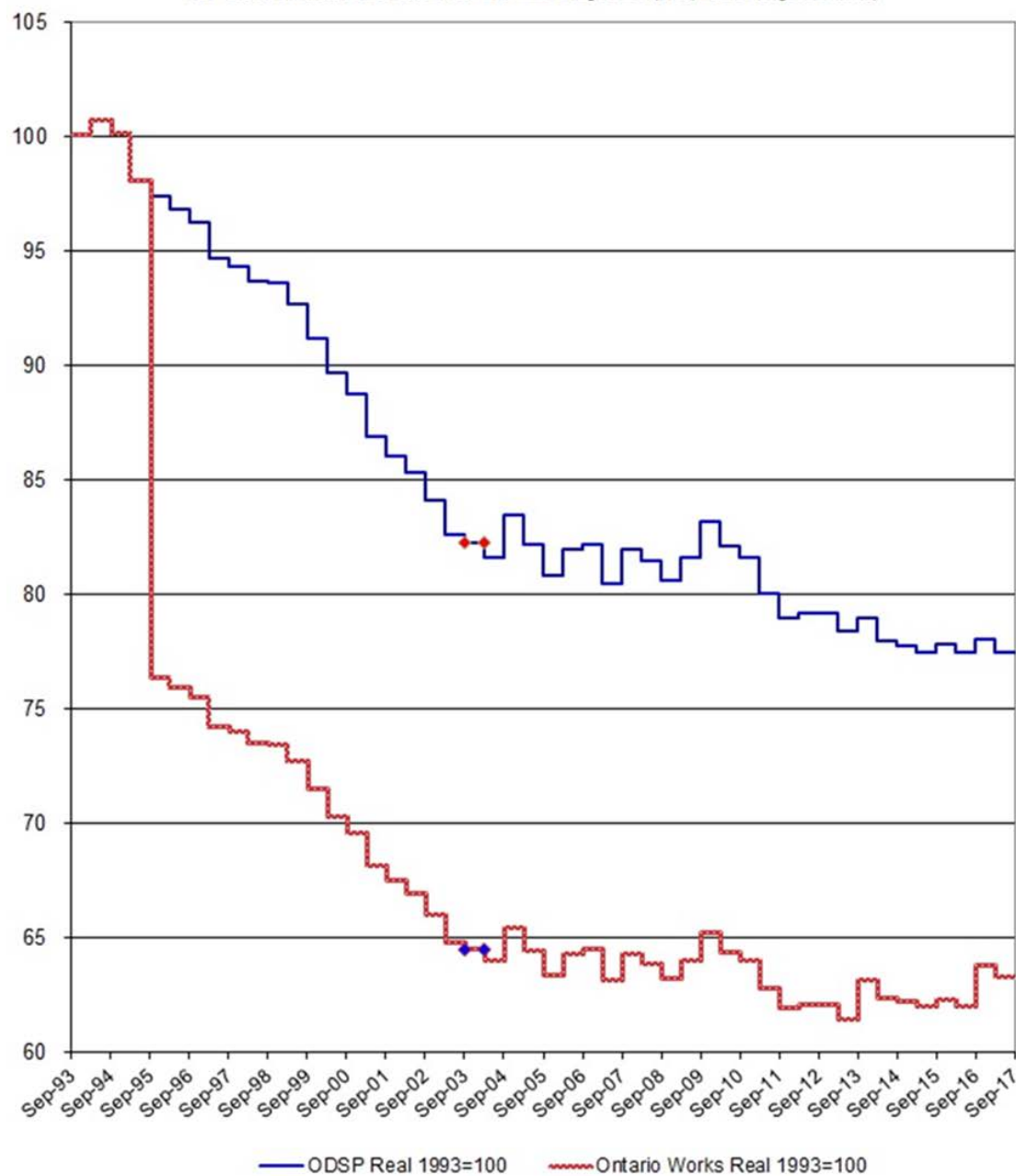
- The hardships of people who depend on social assistance in Hamilton are shown by the 2019 report by Public Health Services on the monthly cost of a *Nutritious Food Basket*
- Single recipients of Ontario Works are the worst off: after paying an average monthly rent for a bachelor apartment, they are \$236 short of being able to afford a Nutritious Food Basket
- *This deficit more than doubled in 2019, compared to 2018 when it was only \$101 per month*

Steep downward slide in the buying power of social assistance began 25 years ago

- The reduced buying power of social assistance began with a harsh 21.6% reduction to the rates by Ontario's last PC government in 1995. It has been on a downward slide ever since
- Bryan, 62, is a Hamilton man caught in the current crisis. He was out of the job market for 12 years—caring for an ill mother. On his return, he could only find work that was precarious, and physically draining. Eventually, the effect on his health made him turn to Ontario Works. Bryan's comment on food inflation in 2019 was, "I have never been this poor."

Ontario Works and ODSP Rates, Adjusted for Inflation -- 1993 to 2017
1993=100

Note: Fall 2016 OW increase reflects \$25 increase in the minimum single benefit (3.67%) not the 1.5% general increase)



MEMBERS OF HAMILTON ANTI-POVERTY DELEGATION TAKE SIGNS TO QUEENS PARK



Ford Government unresponsive to Advocacy Groups

- Advocacy groups, such as those who went to Queens Park, have taken continual action to urge the government to respond to the growing gap between social assistance and the cost of living:
- Public meetings with knowledgeable speakers
- Letter-writing: over 1,000 to the 2 consecutive Ministers of Social & Community Services
- Direct confrontation: Our trip to Queens Park

CHALLENGE AT QUEENS PARK

- The NDP helped us to confront Minister Todd Smith in Question Period at Queens Park on December 5
- MPP Monique Taylor asked Minister Smith why he had not increased social assistance in 2019
- Minister Smith answered, incorrectly, as shown in the Hansard record:
"Our government already increased rates by 1.5% to those on social assistance **earlier this year.**"

OUR REQUEST TO COUNCIL

- We have given you new facts about the suffering of people in Hamilton who are expected to survive on a static social allowance while food prices are increasing significantly
- The MCPI is asking you to support a motion to have the Mayor write to the Premier and relevant Ministers, such as Community & Social Services, Finance, and Health
- The letter would urge the Government to make a substantial increase to social assistance rates, to compensate for giving no increase in 2019, a year of unusually high food prices in Ontario.