



June 15, 2020

Dear Chair and Members of the Emergency and Community Services Committee,

Re: Delegation from the Hamilton Basic Income Group

We wish to thank the City of Hamilton for its ongoing support for the basic income concept and the Basic Income Hamilton group (est. 2015).

Council was instrumental in advocating for Hamilton to become a site for the Ontario Basic Income Pilot project (2017-2018), and as such, you are no doubt aware that basic income is a policy option that had begun to transform individuals, families and communities.

In 2018, Council justly denounced the cancellation of the Basic Income pilot. Now that our municipality is in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are imploring Council to once again demonstrate its support by passing motions to:

- Call on the provincial and federal governments to adopt a permanent basic income program to protect Canadians from loss of employment, poverty, and precarious work.
- Reaffirm Council's support for Basic Income Hamilton (see attached).

The pandemic has exacerbated the inequities that already existed in our city, province, and country. As Hamiltonians, we are all too familiar with the fact that the current system is not adequately addressing the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. The poverty gap continues to widen during this crisis, and if we don't demand better, it will continue to do so when the next inevitable crisis follows.

COVID-19 is creating unprecedented challenges, and as such requires an unprecedented response by all levels of government. A basic income has wide-reaching benefits and can be a crucial part of our economic and social post-pandemic recovery.

Health and Basic Income

Ten years after *The Hamilton Spectator* launched the Code Red series, health outcomes in Hamilton have declined. Despite increased awareness and many initiatives, the health and life expectancy of Hamiltonians continue to be determined by socio-economic status. Despite Hamilton's vision to be the best place to raise a child and age successfully, children in our community are still without adequate nutritious food, many depend on breakfast programs, and other families are forced to over-rely on food banks. This is, plainly, unacceptable.

Basic Income, however, can be part of the solution to this long-standing problem, which despite our community's best and genuine efforts, continues to persist. In the recent McMaster University study, *Southern Ontario's Basic Income Experience*, using data from participants from

the cancelled basic income pilot, researchers found that receiving a basic income, even if only for the short time of one year improved the overall health outcomes of recipients by nearly 80 percent. The outcome was the same for mental health, with over 80 percent of survey respondents reporting a positive effect of basic income on their mental well-being, while over half of all respondents indicated that their mental health improved during the pilot. Research from the Dauphin Manitoba basic income experiment, Mincome (1974-1979), also showed that unconditional cash payments lead to improved mental health in communities. Hospital visits dropped by 8.5 per cent with significant savings in healthcare, and there were reductions in the rates of psychiatric hospitalization, as well as the number of mental illness-related consultations with health professionals. Even the Canadian Medical Association passed a motion in support of basic income in 2015. As a community that saw positive and tangible results from the basic income pilot, the social determinants of health in Hamilton are impossible to deny.

Socio-economic Status and Basic Income

Socio-economic sinkholes have formed across the country from the erosion of Canada's social and health security programs and traditional full-time employment. Globalization and neoliberal policies have favoured corporate and business priorities over human and community wellbeing. Income inequality has been rising for decades; precarious work has become the job offering of choice of more employers. Jobs with benefits and pensions grow fewer and fewer and automation of work continues to be an inevitable and fast approaching reality. Workers increasingly need income bridging because of the irregular income flows from growing precarious employment.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefits (CERB) program is, in effect, a temporary basic income program for Canadians who have lost their jobs, temporarily or permanently, which is reaching its initial four-month expiry date. Despite the measured approach to reopening our economy, we must be realistic and consider that the effects of the pandemic will be long lasting, and hence that the CERB must evolve into a more sustainable, long-term program. The CERB's quick implementation and administration through the Canada Revenue Agency demonstrates an efficient model of how a permanent basic income for Canadians can function. The Basic Income Canada Network (BICN) has created three costing models detailing how a permanent basic income can be achieved.

However, even considering the above, we know that vulnerable Hamiltonians on Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program are among those excluded from receiving the CERB. The citizens on these programs receive significantly less than Canadians on the CERB (\$733/month versus \$2,000/month). Why is it acceptable for our vulnerable citizens to live below the poverty line lacking basic needs? Why should they be stuck in cycles of unemployment and poverty traps laden with layers of bureaucracy, confusion and very little humanity? This is simply unfair and unacceptable. The poverty that used to seemingly be relegated only to the downtown area

has made its way to intersections in the upper city, and even to the Ancaster Meadowlands. For every Hamiltonian we publicly see suffering, there are many that go unseen. Our fellow citizens are among those legislated to poverty and need help to escape it.

COVID-19 has touched the lives of 100% of the population of Hamilton. Many have been helped by the CERB, but very many have not. Regardless of the economic situation it left each of us in, if a basic income had been in place when this pandemic began, the municipality and every resident of the municipality would have been in a much better place. There likely would not have even had to be any special programs initiated to ensure that the citizens would be alright. As it is, Hamilton has been struggling, trying to deal with a small percentage of the population who have no resources with which to fight the obstacles the pandemic has created. Our woeful provincial and federal safety nets have been shown that they are underfunded and inadequate to deal with not only events of this magnitude, but normal day-to-day living for many people. While a basic income would not cure all ills, it would make problems that arise because of a lack of income a lot easier to manage.

Establishing a Permanent Basic Income Program

Hamilton is in a unique position to lead because of its wealth of experience and expertise in the basic income realm, including its ability to tell the successful stories of Hamiltonians who participated in the basic income pilot; its position as the host location at McMaster University for the North American Basic Income Group (NABIG) Congress in 2018 and 2020 (cancelled due to COVID-19); the important research study on Southern Ontario's basic income pilot experience by McMaster researchers; as well as an active local advocacy group.

Today, we implore the City of Hamilton to join our 57 Canadian Senators, the Basic Income Canada Youth Network, health and medical professionals from across the country, Canadian municipalities, community foundations, faith groups, many of Canada's leading economists, and over 100 CEOs of major Canadian companies who have all strongly advocated for a sustainable basic income program. Hamilton has the opportunity to join this esteemed company, and so, we ask Hamilton City Council for its support today. **We must urge our provincial and federal governments to pursue a partnership to adopt a permanent basic income program in order for our communities to successfully weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic and other inevitable storms on the horizon.**

Sincerely,

Lisa Alfano and Jeff Martin, BIH co-Chairs

Jessie Golem and John Mills, BIH Steering Committee members

Reaffirming Council's Support for Basic Income Hamilton

Basic Income Hamilton (BIH) is a volunteer advocacy group established in 2015. An official working group of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, our mandate is to “raise awareness, educate, and engage Hamiltonians on the concept of basic income.”

We appreciate the support that Council has provided to Basic Income Hamilton since March 21, 2016 when the following motion was approved:

"That the appropriate staff from Public Health Services and Community and Emergency Services be directed to meet with member(s) of the Hamilton Basic Income Guarantee Committee to investigate the feasibility of developing a plan of facilitation for collaborative Basic Income advocacy" (Meeting minutes BOH16-003 Item (e) (i)).

This motion and declaration of support from Council has enabled BIH to pursue our mission. The assistance from City staff, currently one member in the Healthy and Safe Communities Department, has been essential for our monthly group and steering committee meetings. It has also been instrumental in supporting the contributions BIH has been able to make towards the basic income movement including:

- Securing funding from the Hamilton Community Foundation
- Presenting several public forums and events in Hamilton
- Launching an information-rich website
- Designing a new logo and printing outreach material (i.e. banner and business cards)
- Partnering with the Hamilton Public Library and other community organizations.

We are asking Council to reaffirm its support for Basic Income Hamilton, so that we can continue to build on the work we have been engaged in over the past five years. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extraordinary challenges it presents, we feel our work is more relevant to our community than ever.

Thank you for your consideration.