

FOLLOW UP TO 2023 MOTION RE SUPPORT FOR RAISING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

PRESENTATION TO EMERGENCY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

JUNE 20, 2024

DR. SALLY PALMER, CHAIR,

HAMILTON SOCIAL WORK ACTION COMMITTEE

OUR ASK

The Hamilton Social Work Action Committee is asking your Committee to support a motion to encourage the Assoc. of Municipalities of Ontario to vote at their annual meeting (Aug. 18-21) to encourage the government to provide a substantial raise to social assistance rates

The Director of Government Relations and all other Hamilton representatives attending the meeting should ask, at the earliest possible date, for a meeting with Min. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community & Social Services

Motion passed on Feb. 16, 2023: That the Director of Government Relations & Community Engagement and the Director of Ontario Works look to identify other advocacy opportunities to join other social service agencies or municipalities in advocating for rate increases to social assistance.

Followup to Motion: Dir. Morgan Stahl reported in a meeting (March 26, 2024) with members of the Hamilton Social Work Action Committee, that she attempted to advocate at the annual meeting of the Assoc. of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) in August 2023. She made a delegation request to speak with Minister Michael Parsa (Children, Community & Social Services).

Instead of meeting with Dir. Stahl, Min. Parsa sent Charmaine Williams, *Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity*, which is part of Min. Parsa's Ministry. When she met with Dir. Stahl and Councillor Tammy Hwang, and others, Assist. Min. Williams announced that she was not able to discuss social assistance (despite being in the Ministry that controls this program) but was willing to discuss women's issues. Consequently, the group abandoned the plan to discuss the inadequate and frozen rates of social assistance.

We are returning to the E&CS Committee today to ask that a more determined effort be made to meet with Minister Parsa, and to strengthen the position of the AMO Board about social assistance rates. Ideally, the AMO Board would bring a motion to the municipal representatives at the meeting asking the government to remove the freeze from OW and give a substantial raise to both OW and ODSP.

The 2024 AMO meeting in Ottawa begins on August 18, so the work needs to begin now. Director Stahl's replacement, Acting Director, Jessica Chase, and any Hamilton Councillors who attend the AMO can be influential by making an early request to speak to Min. Parsa, and by asking the AMO Board of Directors to strengthen their policy re social assistance rates.

At present the AMO Board is taking a 'half-way' position about the rates. They have endorsed a policy to ask the government to stop withholding the shelter portion of OW and ODSP, amounting to several hundred dollars, from the monthly cheques of 'homeless' recipients.

The AMO Board should be urged to go beyond this and ask the government to raise OW rates: the top monthly cheque has been frozen at \$733 per month for a single recipient since 2018

- **Actions by HSWAC and CAWDB:** We have been carrying on a petition campaign to raise the rates since Spring 2022. To date there have been 195 presentations by supportive MPPs, representing 5,265 original signatures.
- On March 25, 2024, the government began an effort to block MPPs from reading out the terms of the petition when they tabled them. The Speaker ruled that MPPs could not be silenced, so the PCs responded by filibusters for the next 2 days—they had one PC MPP read out a petition that took the entire 30 min. of the Petition Session, thus shutting out all other MPPs.
- Finally, on March 28, the Speaker ruled that spoken presentations should be condensed, suggesting a one-minute limit.

More recently, the government managed to prevent the continued presentation of our petitions by ending the Legislative session one week early (June 6) and extending the Legislature's summer break from Sept. 5 to Oct. 21.

Minister Parsa's resistance to raising the rates is also shown by his unresponsiveness to our petitions. He is required to give written responses to the MPPs who present petitions.

His answers ignore the freeze on OW and focus on the small cost-of-living increases that have been made to ODSP, and other sources of help. For a single person on OW these sources amount to less than \$150 per month.

Effects of increasing poverty on recipients: As most of us know, frozen rates at a time of high inflation have created a crisis for recipients. Many are living in tents, or on the streets and are waiting in long lineups for food in every kind of weather.

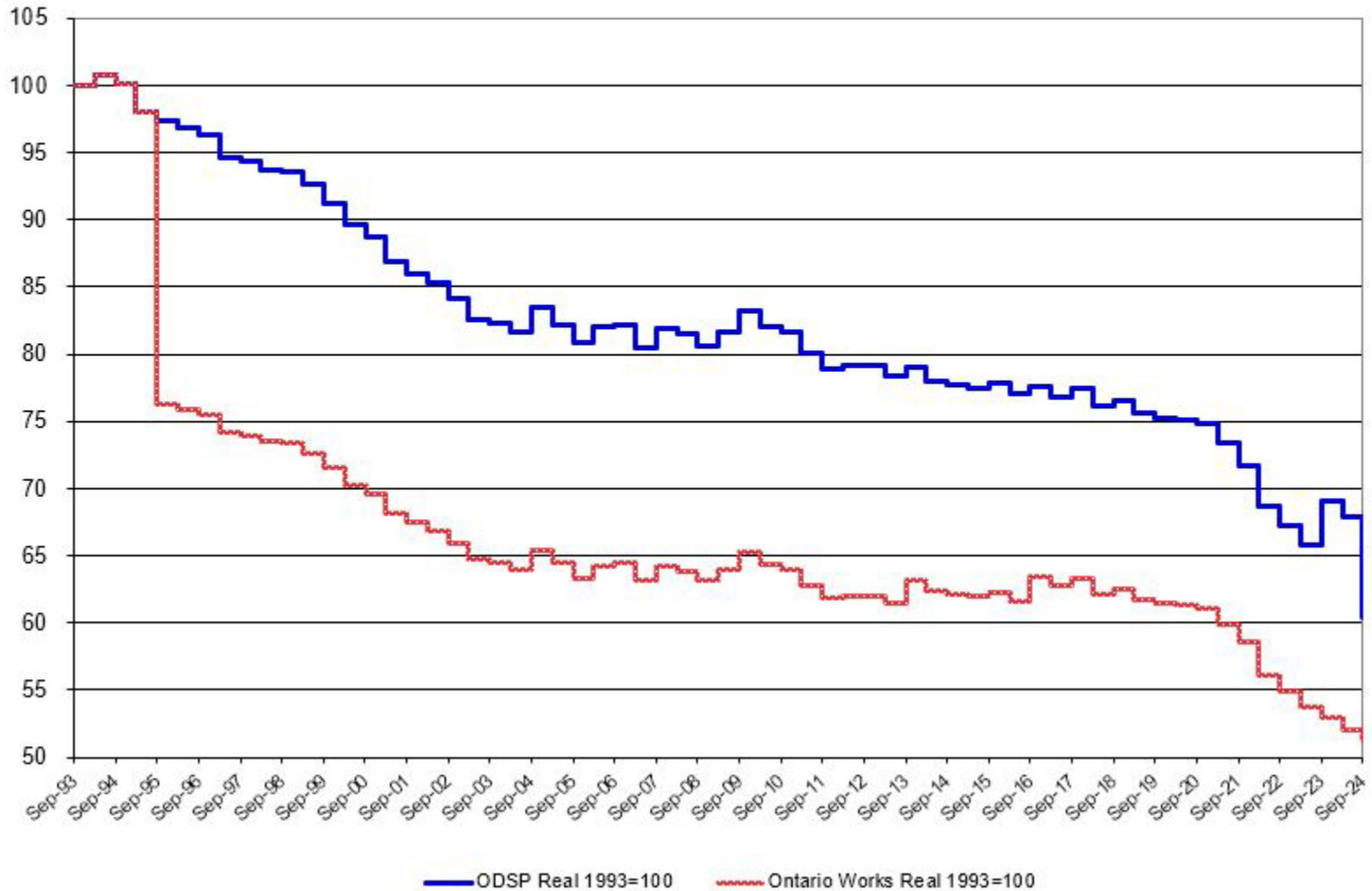
A petition circulated by MPP Chris Glover states that: more patients are asking for MAID because they cannot afford the services they need to accommodate their disabilities; and the death rate for homeless people living on the streets or shelters in Toronto has doubled since the PCs came to power in 2018.

The sinking value of social assistance cheques, especially for OW recipients, is shown by a chart from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Led by a 21.6% cut to social assistance by a PC government in 1995, the buying value of OW has been cut in half over the past 30 years.

OW and ODSP Rates, Adjusted for Inflation 1993 to 2024

1993=100

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MOTION TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE E&CS COMMITTEE

That the E&CS Committee or City Council ask the Board of AMO to take a stronger position on social assistance rates, including ending the 5+ year freeze on Ontario Works

That the Board arrange for members of AMO (all the municipalities represented at the August meeting) to vote to ask the government to give a substantial raise to both OW and ODSP

That this advocacy from Hamilton begin as early as possible, so that it will allow time for the Board of AMO to strengthen their position

That as many Hamilton representatives as possible attend the 2024 AMO meeting in Ottawa, Aug. 18 to 21.