

**Ministry of Children
and Youth Services**

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APR 08 2008

Ms. Linda MacGregor
President
Canadian Federation of University Women
Ontario Council
713-95 High Park Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
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Linda
Dear Ms. ~~MacGregor~~:

Thanks for your letter and for sharing the pre-budget brief from the Canadian Federation of University Women Ontario Council regarding poverty reduction.

I appreciate your comments about the impact of poverty on many communities. That's why this government is taking the initiative to build a poverty reduction strategy that will make a difference. We're developing a comprehensive strategy that will help all Ontarians achieve their full potential, because we want everyone to have the opportunity to succeed.

We're committed to developing poverty measures and targets within the first year of our mandate. This is an important step in developing a provincial poverty reduction strategy. We're taking a comprehensive and coordinated approach, and we'll work together to make Ontario a stronger place for everyone.

The cornerstone of our strategy was the creation of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB), a \$2.1 billion commitment to help low-income families and their children. The OCB treats all children in eligible families equally, whether their parents work or receive social assistance. This program helps parents receiving social assistance make the transition to work, because they continue to receive support for their children after beginning employment.

In July 2007, the OCB provided eligible low-income families with a special one-time down payment of up to \$250 per child. Monthly benefits, which will begin in July 2008, will rise to up to \$1,100 annually per child once the program is fully implemented in 2011. By then, this investment will reach 1.3 million children in 600,000 families across Ontario.

We understand the importance that health and nutrition play in the development of children and are doubling funding for the Student Nutrition Program by investing \$32 million over three years to expand existing services. These programs currently provide healthy snacks and meals for 400,000 kids across Ontario.

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We're also moving forward with a \$135 million plan to provide dental benefits to low-income families. Public health units, community health centres, dentists and dental hygienists will provide prevention and treatment services so that dental health doesn't become a barrier to opportunity.

You may also be interested to know about other initiatives made by our government to help families with children. We've expanded the availability of child care through the creation of more than 22,000 new licensed child care spaces in the last three years, and streamlined the child care subsidy system so that it's fair and consistent across the province.

We want to make investments where they will do the most good – addressing basic needs such as housing. In January 2008, the Rental Opportunity for Ontario Families (ROOF) program, a new \$185 million housing allowance, began helping low-income working families with children pay their rent. This program is targeted to create more than 27,000 new housing allowances that will provide families with up to \$100 per month for a maximum of five years, making housing more affordable for those in greatest need.

The 2008 Budget included \$100 million to assist with repairs to about 4,000 affordable housing units. We are also making up to \$500 million in low-cost loans available to Ontario municipalities to make it easier for them to repair social housing.

On March 31, 2008, Ontario's minimum wage increased to \$8.75, which is the fifth increase since 2004. Social assistance rates are going to go up by two per cent again this year, the fourth increase in as many years.

This is all important progress, but our government recognizes that to address poverty we'll need all hands on deck – commitment from community partners, government and individuals. We know that we need to continue to work together to find solutions to the many issues facing Ontarians. We also know that we need different strategies to address the causes of poverty.

I can assure you that I will keep your suggestions in mind as we develop our poverty reduction strategy. Later this year, we will be meeting as many people as possible from across Ontario's many diverse communities, representatives of businesses and other levels of government to hear what they have to say. I encourage you to participate during that time. Further information will be available on my ministry's website at www.children.gov.on.ca in the near future.

I appreciate your words of encouragement and support. Thanks again for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deb Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deb Matthews
Minister