

January 5, 2018

**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL:** [incomesecurity@ontario.ca](mailto:incomesecurity@ontario.ca)

Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Communications and Marketing Branch  
7th Floor, Hepburn Block  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Jaczek,

**Re: Income Security: A Roadmap for Change**

Please accept this letter as an endorsement of the *Feedback Submission on “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change”* (the “Submission”) (December 15, 2017), Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) and the Ontario Community Legal Clinic System’s Steering Committee on Social Assistance (SCSA).<sup>1</sup>

The HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO) is the only legal clinic in Canada devoted exclusively to the HIV community. We practice a broad range of law, including social assistance and other forms of income maintenance, tenancy, human rights, health and immigration, and engage in public legal education, law reform, and community development initiatives. Since 1995, among other activities, we have handled well over 50,000 legal issues, conducted hundreds of public legal education workshops, and intervened in 10 matters at the Supreme Court of Canada. For more information about HALCO’s work, see our most recent annual report at <https://www.halco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Annual-Report-HALCO-2016-2017.pdf>.

We see how living in poverty, compounded by the realities of oppression and discrimination based on health status, sexuality, gender, gender identity, race, and immigration status, negatively impacts the lives of people living with HIV. And we see how these issues impact nutrition, housing stability and social engagement, and ultimately result in poor individual physical and mental health outcomes as well as increased public spending.

Across Ontario, we regularly see people living with HIV spiral deeper and deeper into poverty the longer they try to subsist on meagre provincial social assistance programs. Because Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits do not cover the true costs of housing, food and other basic necessities, recipients can and do end up under-housed, hungry, isolated and prone to illness. Further, overly burdensome state surveillance can exacerbate problems, impeach dignity and compromise the immune systems of people living with HIV.

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<sup>1</sup> The document can be found at <http://incomesecurity.org/policy-advocacy/our-response-to-a-roadmap-for-change/>.

Many of our clients in receipt of social assistance rely on food banks to meet their basic needs. Many are socially isolated as they have difficulty accessing means of social engagement without money for public transportation. People often live in precarious housing situations with little or no tenancy rights because they cannot afford to access more stable housing. People remain in abusive relationships because they cannot afford to move. And people are forever in debt, including to exploitative pay-day loan companies, in order to pay for rent, food and clothes they cannot afford.

*Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* (the “Roadmap”)<sup>2</sup> is the first report in 30 years that recommends major investments in and improvements to programs that affect the lives of low-income people in Ontario. The Roadmap reflects a long-overdue paradigm shift in approach to the provision of income supports and other services for low-income people in Ontario – one that puts people, and their needs and rights, at the centre of the system.

We endorse the Submission of ISAC and SCSA, and call for immediate social assistance rate increases.

First, it is essential that people living in poverty are meaningfully involved in the implementation of the Roadmap. This will ensure that people’s needs and rights are at the centre of the system.

Next, it is vital that income security be “adequate,” which means able to address the true nature and cost of required items and services, including health needs. We support immediately raising social assistance rates based on the Low-Income Measure (LIM) and the development of an Ontario Market Basket Measure to replace the LIM without delay. Health needs, however, must not be forgotten. We support the Roadmap’s inclusion of essential health needs in the definition of income security, which means ensuring access to health needs such as medications, vision and hearing devices, dentures and medical transportation benefits.

In conclusion, the Roadmap recommendations, if implemented properly, will not only provide economic benefits across society but ensure that low-income people are better able to address their own needs, exercise their own autonomy, and live in dignity and health.

We thank you for facilitating the process that brought about the Roadmap and urge the government to act immediately.

Sincerely,

**HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario**

per:



**Ryan Peck**  
Barrister & Solicitor  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> The document can be found at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/income-security-roadmap-change>.