



FAITH COMMUNITIES IN
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

When we invest in people, we all benefit

Brief to:

Finance Minister Rod Phillips

and

the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

By:

ISARC - Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition

October 16, 2020

When we invest in people, we all benefit

The *Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition* (ISARC) welcomes this opportunity to have a voice in shaping the province's upcoming budget.

ISARC, the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition is a coalition representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith communities across Ontario. These include the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, Anglican Provincial Synod of Ontario, Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, Canadian Unitarian Council, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto, Congregation Darchei Noam, Council of Imams, Council of Canadian Hindus, Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Eastern Ontario District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Islamic Humanitarian Service, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Salvation Army, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Toronto Board of Rabbis, and the United Church of Canada.

ISARC advocates with and for Ontarians, living in low income households, who struggle to support themselves and their families. For more than thirty years, ISARC has participated in government consultations and hearings aimed at reducing poverty and providing an income security system that provides a livable income and that respects basic human dignity.

With the arrival of COVID-19 a much greater proportion of the population is experiencing precarity and that has increased the understanding and commitment of the Ontario public to finally massively change the focus of our public financial investments so that we all can survive the pandemic and build a more inclusive participatory society.

ISARC would like to emphasize again what we said in our brief of January 24, 2020 to the government in the last budget consultations. They reflect what ISARC continues to hear from people pushed to the margins of our society, and so we bring them forward again as recommendations that need to be addressed:

- A hard day's work deserves a fair day's pay
- Income supports need to be raised to a level where people can make ends meet
- We need more affordable housing

We have reviewed the **Focus Questions** for which you have sought public input and provide you the following feedback.

Section 1: Economic recovery

Question #1:

Across Ontario and around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact how we live, work and do business. What should the top priority be for the Fall 2020 Budget as the province continues to fight the pandemic and work towards long-term recovery? (500-word limit)

Response:

The top priority for the Fall 2020 Budget as the province continues to fight the pandemic and work towards long-term recovery should be to enable the population to adhere to the directives of the public health leadership and to encourage front line workers to continue deliver essential public services. In particular this means that the Province should in this year's budget:

1. Implement a permanent Basic Livable Income, if possible in combination with the Federal Government and its temporary income support programs established by Bill C-4;
2. Amend the Employment Standards Act to provide at least 10 paid sick days each year that workers including alleged independent contractors can take to keep their pay whole while dealing with health concerns whether connected to COVID-19 or not;
3. Take immediate measures to provide secure housing so that everyone can safely socially isolate and have a permanent roof over their heads, including but not limited to removing all barriers for municipalities in adopting inclusive zoning rules appropriate to their community. ISARC is not proposing to elaborate yet another set of possible solutions for affordable housing. Endless work has been done and myriad solutions have already been developed and put forward. The 'tools' to achieve these are there as well. What ISARC

believes is needed now and urgently is the funding and political will to make them a reality;

4. Legislate permanent enhancements to hourly rates for all front line workers. For PSWs it should be at least equal to the action of the Quebec government and proportionate enhancements for other front line workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has made us all very aware of the need for more staffing and better pay. We commend the government for recognizing the need for staff top-ups in long-term care. The government's action to support short-term pay top-ups clearly underscores the need for ensuring fair wages that are consistent and long-lasting. At the same time, it also raises the question and calls for further examination of privatization in relation to those in long-term care.

Question #2:

The economic impacts of COVID-19 are being felt in communities across Ontario. As we plan for renewal, growth and long-term recovery, how would you like to see the government make our province a more attractive place for people to invest, work and grow a business? Rank the following from most important to least important:

- *eliminating unnecessary red tape for businesses*
- *lowering taxes for businesses*
- *creating new grants and financial support for businesses*
- *Making it easier for businesses to access the money they need to grow (for example, from banks, private equity, venture capitalists)*
- *Promoting Ontario-Made products and local businesses that make up Ontario's Mainstreet*
- *Expediting infrastructure initiatives*

Response:

The economic impacts of COVID-19 are being felt in communities across Ontario. Reviewing your proposed list, the only examples we support are:

1. Expediting infrastructure initiatives but without jeopardizing the environment, including investing in social infrastructure such as publicly delivered child care, and more publicly-owned long term care;

2. Promoting Ontario-Made products and local businesses that make up Ontario's Mainstreet.

Question #3:

Is there anything else the government can do to make our province a more attractive place for people to invest, work and grow a business? Please share your ideas below. (200-word limit)

Response:

The government can take the following steps to make our province a more attractive place for people to invest, work and grow a business:

1. Remove barriers in the way of workers who wish to be collectively represented in their relationship with their employers so they can take active steps to improve their disposable income and job security.
2. Raise taxes on corporate profits unless there is substantial re-investment in job creation that provides full-time employment with benefits and at a pay rate at least equal to the average industrial wage.

Question #4:

Ontario has made important investments in job training and job creation. What more would you like to see the provincial government do to help people find a good job? Choose all that apply:

- *Create incentives for employers to rehire employees laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic*
- *Extend financial supports to businesses and employees (for example, support for businesses through government grants and loans, interest and penalty-free periods to make payments for provincially administered taxes)*
- *Invest in the skilled trades and apprenticeship opportunities*
- *Work with the postsecondary sector to ensure programs are preparing students for the jobs of today and the future*
- *Other*

Response:

Ontario has made important investments in job training and job creation.

The provincial government can do the following to help people find a good job:

- Create incentives for employers to rehire employees laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and higher taxes on corporate profits for those companies which do not rehire laid off workers.
- Invest in the skilled trades and apprenticeship opportunities in cooperation with the relevant trade unions.
- Work with the postsecondary sector to ensure programs are preparing students for the jobs of today and the future
- Other:
Make mandatory, both in high school and in postsecondary, program material on rights in the workplace including health and safety protections and the right to engage in collective bargaining.

Section 2: Supporting people

Question #5:

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the global economy. The government has been focused on providing support and relief to people and families struggling as a result. What should the government do to provide additional help to those who have been negatively affected by the global pandemic? Please tell us about your top idea. (500-word limit)

Response:

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the global economy. The government has been focused on providing support and relief to people and families struggling as a result. CERB has shown that we can not only successfully cut 'red tape' but also deliver an income support that helps the most vulnerable.

The top priority action by the government in providing help to those who have been negatively affected by the global pandemic should be the establishment of a permanent Basic Livable Income for all adult Ontarians.

Question #6:

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us differently. How helpful do you think each of the actions below would be in your recovery from COVID-19?

(1. Not at all helpful. 2. Not so helpful. 3. Somewhat helpful. 4. Very helpful)

- *Lowering taxes for individuals*
- *Providing direct financial support*
- *Increasing cash flow by offering deferrals for payments (for example, taxes)*
- *Helping workers learn new skills for their careers*
- *Making it easier to manage personal finances (for example, through learning new skills or tools to save money)*
- *Expediting infrastructure initiatives (such as accelerating the construction of critical highway, transit, and broadband infrastructure)*

Response:

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all of us differently. Our assessment of helpful actions by the government from the following options provided by your Survey are as follows (1 - Not at all helpful, 2 - Not so helpful, 3 - Somewhat helpful, 4 - Very helpful):

- 1 - Lowering taxes for individuals
- 4 - Providing direct financial support
- 1 - Increasing cash flow by offering deferrals for payments (for example, taxes)
- 3 - Helping workers learn new skills for their careers, which must include access to training that is timely and affordable
- 3 - Making it easier to manage personal finances (for example, through learning new skills or tools to save money)
- 1 - Expediting infrastructure initiatives (such as accelerating the construction of critical highway, transit, and broadband infrastructure)

Question #7:

Do you have any other idea for how the government can support workers and families during the COVID-19 pandemic? (200 word limit)

Response:

Once again, the main actions the government can take to support workers and families during the COVID-19 pandemic are:

1. To implement a Basic Livable Income
2. To provide universal paid sick leave
3. To provide safe, permanent, affordable housing
4. To substantially increase pay for front line workers
5. To substantially increase front line health care hands on hours of care to residents of long term care homes
6. To provide more mental health services that can be readily accessed by all Ontarians

Question #8:

The provincial budget needs to balance many priorities. Please rank the following in order of importance:

- *Helping Ontario's economy recover*
- *Supporting families and workers*
- *Outlining a plan to balance the budget*
- *Making new investments in critical public services, like health care, education and long-term care*
- *Making additional investments in infrastructure (such as accelerating the construction of critical highway, transit and broadband infrastructure)*

Response:

The provincial budget needs to balance many priorities. We rank the following in order of importance (most important to least important):

- Supporting families and workers (including those who are jobless)

- Making new investments in critical public services, such as health care (including mental health services and pharmacare), education and long-term care
- Making additional investments in infrastructure, such as accelerating the construction of critical highway, transit, and broadband infrastructure (particularly in rural areas)
- Helping Ontario's economy recover
- Outlining a plan to balance the budget

In Conclusion

As the government prepares its budget, we urge it to be guided by the belief that a budget is not simply about the allocation of funding for programs and services but rather about people and ensuring that *everyone* is included and that *no one* is excluded from being full participants in society. When we invest in people, we all benefit.

We also urge you to implement initiatives immediately, as a bold and strong message of commitment to addressing the precarious health and well-being of Ontarians who are in a desperate struggle for survival. We must take immediate action to defeat the pandemic as a precondition for bringing back the economy. In order for the public to be willing to engage in social distancing and the other measures necessary to stop transmission of the infection we need to provide income support as well as safe accommodations to self-isolate. In order to encourage front line workers to continue delivering essential public services during the pandemic, we need to demonstrate with our financial resources that we value their labour and their sacrifice.

“The way in which we treat our most vulnerable neighbours...speaks volumes about the very nature of our society. Ethically and morally, a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable and marginalized members.... we have a long way to go before we can claim with any honesty that we are applying moral treatment in dealing with the least fortunate among us.” - *Persistent Poverty*