

CUTS HURT US ALL



AT RISK: INCOME SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

December 21, 2011

MEMO TO: All OPSEU members in the Ontario Disability Support Program
All Local Presidents with OPS members

FROM: President Warren (Smokey) Thomas, OPSEU
Roxanne Barnes, Chair, MCSS MERC
Dylan Lineger, Chair, ODSP Sub-committee of MCSS MERC

Subject: Our campaign

We are writing to tell you about an internal worksite campaign that we will be starting in January.

As many of you know, the services we provide to nearly 400,000 people with disabilities in Ontario are at risk. There are two major threats.

Threat #1: Integration into a privatized ServiceOntario

In the 2011 Budget, the government signalled huge changes for the delivery of public services. The last recession left Ontario with a big budget deficit. Premier Dalton McGuinty wants to pay it off with deep spending cuts and privatization.

The government announced it will consider privatizing ServiceOntario and adding municipal, provincial and federal programs to its delivery network.

The union later learned that social assistance, including ODSP, social housing and the Family Responsibility Office could be delivered by ServiceOntario in the future.

The government will decide on a new operating model for ServiceOntario and whether it will be privatized in time for next spring's provincial budget.

Threat #2: Downloading program delivery to municipalities

Another threat comes from the government potentially downloading the delivery of ODSP to municipalities. As you are well aware, municipalities currently deliver Ontario Works (OW).

Co-Commissioner Frances Lankin of the government's social assistance review told the union in October that the Commission may recommend the downloading of ODSP in an Options Paper to be submitted to the government this month, but not made public until January or February of next year.

Frances Lankin has told the union she has spoken with Don Drummond, the banker hired by the government to make recommendations on ways to cut and eliminate programs that deliver public services.

Don Drummond made it clear in a meeting on December 1 with the union that he will follow whatever recommendations that Lankin submits to the government.

Our concerns for the future of ODSP

A close reading of the social assistance review's: *A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas* contains many warning bells for ODSP <http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/uploads/File/A-Discussion-Paper--Issues-and-Ideas--English.pdf>

The discussion paper talks about the need to “better integrate services” between the municipal and provincial levels of government, (p. 32), to simplify income and asset rules (p. 28), to consider delivering special-purpose benefits outside the social assistance system (p. 30), and states flat-out that “the growth of costs must be in line with available resources” (p.31).

How will the pressures to integrate and streamline ODSP and OW while containing costs impact ODSP? This is of particular concern because ODSP's caseload has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years and is currently growing by about five per cent a year (p. 10).

Our concern is this: Downloading the delivery of ODSP to municipalities will lead inevitably to a single integrated social assistance program delivered by municipalities and funded by the province.

The integration of ODSP and OW will have devastating consequences for the 400,000 people with disabilities that we serve.

We believe the unique and progressive elements of ODSP are at risk of being cut including:

- The more generous income and asset exemptions;
- The more generous income and asset rules; and
- The more generous benefits, including the possible loss of the special-purpose benefits, including health-related benefits (for medical travel etc) and community start-up and maintenance benefits.

We believe the strengths of ODSP are at risk of being altered, diluted or cut, including:

- Its flexible definition of disability that looks at the whole person, not simply the person's physical or mental impairments; and
- Its recognition that government shares in the responsibility of providing support for people with disabilities, as distinct from OW, which is based on the premise of providing only temporary assistance to individuals.

ODSP is extremely efficiently run as is

Provincial social assistance expenditures totalled \$7.1 billion in 2010-11. (*Public Accounts of Ontario 2010 -11, Ministry Statements and Schedules, Volume 1, p. 2-93.*)

<http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/paccts/2011/11vol1eng.pdf>

Provincial expenditures on administration which includes costs for delivering ODSP, the Social Benefits Tribunal and the information technology that support both ODSP and Ontario Works were \$255 million. **This means the government only spent 3.6 per cent of its total expenditures on administration. More than 96 per cent of its expenditures went to financial payments to the approximately 857,000 people on OW and ODSP.**

Let's consider the \$255 million in administration costs solely in the context of ODSP. The province spent \$3.6 billion on financial assistance and employment assistance payments to ODSP recipients in 2010-11. Even when you make that calculation, the share of operating expenses going to administration is still incredibly low. **The province only spent 7.15 per cent of its total expenditures on ODSP on administration in 2010-11.**

One final note: OPSEU represents approximately 1,600-1,800 members who work for ODSP. As of March 2011, 391,443 people, or 281,946 cases, accessed ODSP, according to the social assistance review. (*A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*, p.43)

The Canadian Union of Public Employees represents “approximately 5,000 members who deliver a range of municipal social services including ... Ontario Works,” according to the union’s submission to the social assistance review. As of March 2011, 465,871 people, or 258,425 cases, accessed Ontario Works according to the social assistance review. (*A Discussion Paper: Issues and Ideas*, p. 41.)

With far fewer staff, our members at ODSP support a higher caseload, and as a result, the share of provincial costs spent on administration is between three and seven per cent. Why would Premier Dalton McGuinty consider downloading a program that is run extremely efficiently as it is, thanks to our very hard-working members?

Our comprehensive response to these threats

- 1) **OPSEU is joining with the Public Services Foundation of Canada to hold community hearings and town hall forums across Ontario in early 2012 on quality public services and tax fairness. We need to hear from you. See the enclosed schedule. Please attend the hearings and forums in your community. You can also have your say through <http://www.standupontario.org/>**
- 2) **Our workplace solidarity events will kick off on January 5 with the theme of the “OPSEU winter blues”. Show your blues and win cash prizes by sending in a photo of your creative use of blue. See the enclosed calendar.**

The solidarity events will continue on each of the Commission dates and beyond until March 20. Showing support by wearing the colour of the day will help promote the campaign and send a message early in this bargaining year that we will not be silent while our jobs and the valuable services are at stake.

A power point presentation will be available early in January for lunch n’ learns of OPSEU members.

- 3) **We ask all ODSP members to please lobby their local MPPs. We will send you a lobby kit early in January.**

In addition to sponsored activities we encourage your members, locals and area councils to create their own local events in support of the campaign. Together we can influence change that supports our members and our clients for a better Ontario.

In Solidarity,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President



Roxanne Barnes
MERC/CERC Chair



Dylan Liniger
ODSP Sub-committee of MERC