ONTARIO GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO CLAW BACK SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- When they were elected in 2007 on a Poverty Reduction platform, the Ontario government promised to stop clawing back the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) from social assistance recipients.

- Hamilton, realizing that this was a great hardship to its citizens, elected to give some of this ‘Clawback’ back each year from 2006 to 2008.

- Beginning in 2008, the Province did allow recipients to keep the NCBS, but they correspondingly cut back other aspects of social assistance: the clearest example of a claw back came with the introduction of the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) which provided $600 per year for all children in low income families; but for those on social assistance, the government reduced the benefit by ending the “Back to School” and “Winter Clothing” allowances, which were worth about $250 per year.

- In July 2009, the government raised the Ontario Child Benefit from $50 to $92, which sounded like good news for all low-income families; yet again, they clawed back most of this from families on social assistance by reducing the Basic Needs portion of their OW or ODSP cheques.

- Families hit worst by the 2009 ‘Clawback’ were single parents with one child aged 13 and over: the average such family is receiving only $1 per month more than they received last year. I wonder how many of your teenage children actually cost less to feed and clothe than your younger children.

- The poorest families in the province are those on social assistance: the drastic cut to social assistance by the Harris Conservatives has never been replaced; with inflation, the
buying power of social assistance allowances is about 40% less than it was prior to the 1995 cuts.

- It seems especially cruel to make announcements about the Ontario Child Benefit that lead families to expect a meaningful increase, then to claw back most of this; low-income families have received the full benefit, while those on social assistance have, in effect, been told, “You don’t deserve this.”

- Even though children were “taken off social assistance” in Ontario as of July 2008, the amount given to the family continues to be reduced. And this is not the end. We have been told that there is no guarantee it won’t happen again next year.

- The cost of living in the last year did not increase by only $12. Food alone went up by more than 7%. Without a meaningful increase in their budgets, parents (like individual recipients) must continue to rely on food banks, and can in no way afford to provide meals that meet the standards of Canada’s Food Rules.

- We need a Social Assistance Rates Board to ensure that the rates provide for a decent standard of living. Raising children in poverty always leads to higher costs in the long run especially in our health and correction’s systems.

- We urge this body to advocate on behalf of its citizens to the Province to end this new ‘Clawback’ of the Ontario Child Benefit.

\footnote{Figures provided by Hamilton office of OW and ODSP to meeting of OW/ODSP Operations Advisory Committee, Sept. 15, 2009}