APR 25 2006

His Worship Larry Di Ianni
Mayor
City of Hamilton
71 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario
L8P 4Y5

Dear Mayor Di Ianni:

Thank you for your letter to my predecessor, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, regarding social assistance in Ontario.

Like you, this government recognizes that it is difficult to live on a low income, and particularly on social assistance. Since we took office, we have made steady progress toward improving the social assistance system to help people in need.

Our commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of Ontario’s families was reflected in the recent budget announcement. I am proud to say that for the second time in two years, the most vulnerable residents of our province have seen an increase in their assistance. We promised to raise social assistance rates and we are keeping our word. We raised social assistance rates by three per cent in early 2005. We are now raising the rates by another two per cent, effective November 30, 2006, for Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients and December 1, 2006, for recipients of Ontario Works. This will provide an additional $33 million in benefits to families and individuals on social assistance this fiscal year and $80 million in 2007–08 and beyond. Municipalities will not share the cost of the increase until 2007.

We have also committed to permanently flowing through the amount of the 2004, 2005 and 2006 increases to the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS). For families with children in receipt of social assistance, this will mean an additional $56 million in support from the federal NCBS in 2006–07 and $75 million in 2007–08.

These changes represent another step in our long-term strategy to restore fairness, hope and dignity to the people who rely on Ontario’s social assistance programs. However, we recognize that social assistance is just one piece of the puzzle. That is why we are also taking action on child care, affordable housing, minimum wage rates and rental costs.

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We remain committed to working with our municipal partners as we continue to find ways to balance fiscal realities with the provision of effective programs that make a positive difference in the lives of social assistance recipients. We take the concerns of municipalities seriously and value your input as we try to meet these challenges.

Once again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Meilleur
Minister