

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY WARDEN

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November 17, 2010

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Meilleur,

Please be informed that at its meeting held on October 6, 2010, Lambton County Council passed the following resolution concerning Ontario Works eligibility rules for persons disqualified from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP):

- a) **That the Warden, on behalf of Lambton County Council, correspond with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities recommending changes to the Ontario Student Loan program such that there is a debt clearance afforded to individuals in default consistent with the federal student loan program to empower low-income Ontarians to break out of the cycle of poverty.**
- b) **That the Warden, on behalf of Lambton County Council, correspond with the Minister of Community and Social Services recommending changes to Ontario Works rules to extend eligibility to persons disqualified from the Ontario Student Assistance Program to empower low-income Ontarians to break out of the cycle of poverty.**
- c) **That the correspondence noted above, be forwarded to Municipal Clerks requesting endorsement of the recommendations, and that such endorsements be forwarded to the respective Ministers.**
- d) **That the Warden be requested to arrange a meeting with area Members of Provincial Parliament to secure their assistance in the pursuit of the necessary regulatory changes.**

Education is seen as one of the keys to transitioning out of poverty and into long-term, viable employment. The pursuit of post secondary education is very costly in Ontario and financial assistance is a necessity for a person living in poverty.



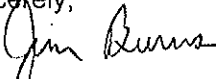
However, many people living in poverty are unable to access post-secondary education due to a previous Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) default. These are people who have attempted to pursue post-secondary education in the past but were not successful for any number of reasons including but not limited to family violence, lack of readiness, child care challenges and transportation issues. Subsequent low paying employment or social assistance did not afford the financial means for repayment and the paperwork involved to apply for OSAP repayment deferral status was often overlooked during the struggle to make ends meet and survive each day with low financial resources.

Ontario Works Regulations further add to the systemic barrier for those with an OSAP default as a single person is not eligible for Ontario Works Financial Assistance if they are in post-secondary school full time. The regulations specifically indicate they are ineligible in the case of a previous OSAP default.

In February 2010, the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council recommended thirteen possible short term changes to social assistance rules that could be implemented that would improve the program without adding substantial costs. One of the recommendations included extending Ontario Works eligibility to persons disqualified from the Ontario Student Assistance Program.

The current Ontario Works Regulations create a significant systemic barrier to individuals in poverty and will continue to do so if not addressed. I urge the Provincial Government to make changes to Ontario Works Regulations to support individuals with their educational plans to exit poverty.

Sincerely,



Jim Burns
Warden

cc: Bob Bailey, M.P.P. Sarnia-Lambton Riding
Maria Van Bommel, M.P.P. Lambton-Kent-Middlesex Riding
Municipal Clerks