

SHAAREI-BETH EL CONGREGATION

RABBI STEPHEN A. WISE

Dear Premier McGuinty

We are writing you on behalf of the social action committees of our Jewish communities.

During the fall election campaign, you and your party promised to make fighting poverty a priority of your second term. You further promised to have the government adopt specific measurable targets for poverty reduction in Ontario. We applaud you for that. Many of us and many of our fellow Jews were deeply moved by this commitment on your part. Feeding and caring for the poor is a key commandment in the Jewish faith (and in all faiths), but our religion also teaches us that more important than handouts is elevating the poor person to a level where they no longer need handouts. Your commitments help move Ontario in that direction.

However, time is of the essence. Today, Ontario has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada: this, in a province that is still one of the richest in the land. We can afford to do better, and do it quickly. Children do not have time to wait while policies are carefully crafted and constituencies consulted. A child who missed a year's good nutrition, or education, or whose family dissolves under grinding economic pressure, will not easily "make it up" next year.

Therefore we urge your government to put a down payment on its poverty fighting strategy in its upcoming spring budget.

- Ontario is the only province in Canada that has not made at least some modest gains in housing spending. Start building affordable housing now, so families will not have to choose between rent and food.
- Upgrade living conditions through the assurance of decent household incomes by creating sustainable employment. And ensuring liveable incomes and essential social resources.
- Improve the capacity of excluded and vulnerable populations for equitable access to employment, income and opportunity resources

The Jewish community is committed to fighting poverty. We want to trust that you mean what you said in the fall election campaign. Please don't disappoint us. Please don't delay any initiative at all until all consultations are complete. Please don't let the poor wait another year.

Yours truly,

