



OPSEU CHILDREN'S AID SECTOR
“Advocating for Workers Who Support Children and Families”

Honourable Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance and Chair of Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet
C/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

February 26, 2011

Dear Minister Duncan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the development of the 2011 Provincial Budget. OPSEU represents a number of members who provide Child Protection services in our communities. I believe that I can help you with some perspective on the current situation in our Child Welfare System. As a *mandated* service we are seized with the responsibility to help and protect Society's children and to work with their families. Children's Aid Societies provide services where often there are no other services available or even welcomed in the most marginalized of families. In response to your request regarding hearing Ontarians' views on what more the government can do to create jobs and improve services for people, while eliminating the deficit, please listen and consider making Children's Aid Society's a *priority* in your budget.

Keeping families together and working towards our mandate of the “*best interests of the child*” are being stretched beyond capacity.

The Ontario government approved a reform in child welfare well known- *Transformation*. *Transformation* had seven pillars which the Child Welfare system was to build its practices upon. Those seven pillars are: Permanency, Differential Response, Alternative to Court Processes, Flexible Intake and Assessment Model, Single Information System and Child Welfare Research Capacity. The policy, in principle, is good policy; however, front-line staff is not able to implement the tools and assessment skills required in a way that embraces the “ideals” of *Transformation* due to numerous unresolved issues. These include administrative burdens, workload issues, complexity of

cases, geography issues.....all of which severely curtail front line workers ability to successfully implement the intent of *Transformation* with successful outcomes.

The recent program “shifts” occurring in Child Welfare as the result of the recommendations from the *Commission for Sustainability in Child Welfare* is now moving the Child Welfare field in a new direction. The *Commissions* efforts to streamline and correct previous faults in the child welfare system are not incompatible with the “ideals” of *Transformation*.. The idea of their mandate is to have every child serviced in their own community, with equitable services to each child, is also excellent but remains idealistic at this point in time, and with aggressive timelines is creating an unprecedented amount of instability across the sector.

Front line workers are suffering under very complex workloads with directives regarding compliance, accountability and timely outcome measurements being the priority. Keeping families together and working towards our mandate of the “*best interests of the child*” has stretched the capacity of the Child Welfare system beyond its limits.

The commissions report, [A Description of the Child Welfare System Landscape in Ontario](#), dated November 2, 2010, points to many complex issues within the system that need attention.

The suggested mergers and amalgamations (Tier one 13 Societies) will create larger agencies, enabling a potential for equitable service across the province for children but at what cost to our children and families? We urge that in working through our mandate of the “*best interests of the child*”, there is a need to be cognizant of the intricacies of bringing all the recommendations made by the Commission, *Transformation* and other new changes and regulations yet to come, into reality. There continues to be a need to recognize the great amounts of stress on families, children, workers and the system that the implementation of these *ideals* takes.

Financially, amalgamations and mergers may not be profitable, and revenue neutral financial outcomes may take several years to develop. In a Report completed by Robert Pickens “[Amalgamated and Integrated Agencies Report](#)” 3/ 4 2010 on behalf of the Eastern Zone Executive Directors states:

“The merged Children’s Aid Societies could not be confident that the merger resulted in savings. The expansion of jurisdiction resulted in some savings and efficiencies but similar to the integrated agency, the broader scope required additional staffing. For example, only one financial manager is required but additional financial staff support is required to complete the increased work.” Pg 4/5 Furthermore the report states: “If the merger is for efficiencies only, those found will not be equal to the costs of change.” P 5/5

Concerning *client access for the larger geographical mergers* the Report states that access for clients was significant:

“The cross jurisdictional merged CAS noted no difference in access to services for clients other than through improved overall service development that occurred within the agency. The larger geographical area created by the merger is more likely to create access difficulties than solve them, and has resulted in additional costs related to travel and the management of satellite offices.”

The larger merged geographical changes are creating a sense of anxiety for families, children and workers in the Child Welfare system. Child welfare workers care a great deal for their families and their children and are concerned about changes in relationships because of geographical changes in foster homes, schools, access visits and recreational activities. Child welfare workers worry that this will create instability for the child and family when the child, family and or workers move or have been moved to different geographical areas. The potential for worker changes is very real as transportation and worker time will increase with such moves and if this is not protected services to our family and children will suffer.

Issues within the Child Welfare Field itself in areas of roles, expectations, directives and responsibilities are varied, causing divisions and discrepancies within the Field.

The document “A Description of the Child Welfare System Landscape in Ontario” dated November 2, 2010 clarifies this issue:

In the experience of CASs, complex, multiple roles and the lack of clarity of responsibilities and integration between the ministry corporate and regional levels can contribute to conflicting system management requirements and inconsistencies in the application of policy, directives and standards. CASs also find that the high compliance and administrative burden on societies (e.g. compliance reporting, recording keeping, etc.) can take away time and focus from serving the needs of children. Pg. 8

Furthermore, the Report indicates that key cost drivers need to be identified and incorporated into a funding model that is inclusive of the real needs of the Societies. These have been identified in the report by the *Commission* as:

- Increasing staff time for referrals, prevention and kinship care per the transformation agenda
- Increasing acuity and complexity of cases and children coming into protection
- Increasing costs for psychological assessments by children’s mental health centers and schools
- Rising complex special needs costs after children are in protection
- Increased staff time for identifying foster care alternatives to reduce reliance on group homes
- Annual increases in salaries and benefits due to labour agreements

- Ministry-approved OPR boarding rate increases
 - Increasing compliance requirements for French language services
 - Legal costs for court supervised access and to deal with litigious lawyers
 - Transportation costs in northern, rural and remote areas
 - Drug costs which are paid at “full prices” pg 24

Funding for *Kinship Care Services* continues to be a burden on Societies, with the Ministry not adequately funding the program. Services for Kinship are at extremes within the CAS system with Kinship is growing at a rapid rate within the field. The expectations are out of control in comparison to the financial ability of agencies to appropriately implement Kinship Care services.

Child Welfare in *Native communities* is in dire need of appropriate funding. Native communities are struggling with implementing the Transformation in all areas; foster care, kinship care and protection services. Communities that are “fly in” only communities need a better understanding from the Government about the complexities of Child Welfare in remote and rural communities. “Delivering child protection services in remote, isolated communities, accessible only by air or ice roads for a few months in the winter, present serious logistical challenges.” Pg. 11 Northern Remoteness Study and Analysis of Child Welfare ...”

Suggestions for action to the Government would include:

- Prevent any further program/service cuts in services in Children’s Aid Societies by creating a funding formula that adequately covers the **REAL** cost of Child Welfare by including the above mentioned cost drivers and by completing a workload study that funds the outcomes.
- That any 2008-10 year end deficits which would result in further layoffs and loss of service programs be eliminated.
- That there be an infusion of dollars to assist in stabilizing staff and resources, i.e. foster care and group home retention and recruitment challenges especially in rural and native communities. Staff turn over; increased sick time and workload (especially regarding paperwork) have been significantly increased with the implementation of government policies and programs, with future shared services and recommendations aiding instability across the sector for the foreseeable future.

The Government is demanding that child welfare agencies have balanced budgets. Balanced budgets make good sense in good economic times where the GDP, job creation and infrastructure is thriving. When people have money they spend money. There are opportunities to be productive and healthy individuals in all areas of their life. When economic times have a downturn and families lose their income, stress builds and families suffer. This Government's policies regarding hydro rates, wage freezes, increased taxes such as the implementation of the HST, corporate tax cuts, high cost of fuel and the non-deficit funding approach for mandated agencies, has increased stress levels to new heights.

History has shown us that in dark economic times that people react more aggressively and stress levels increase in families. Children's Aid Societies have found that in cities where employment and hard economic times have been experienced, that there is a significant rise in child protection services. If there is not have appropriate funding to adjust to these dark economic times, services will be stretched and the excellent and essential services that Children's Aid Societies provide, will suffer allowing children and families will bear the scars of the economy.

The Ministry must continue to **fund Public Services** at levels that are appropriate and healthy. Public Services will help keep the economy running while the Province and the economy make adjustments.

"Economists measure the impact of different types of spending on overall economic growth. What we have learned is that government spending on income support, social services, and infrastructure raises national income by more than the dollar amount spent. The consulting firm, Moody's estimates that one dollar spent on infrastructure adds one dollar and then another 59 cents more to GDP in the same 12 months. The reason is that government spending has a multiplied impact, it gets passed on to others, and spent again rapidly. For example, every dollar increased Employment Insurance payments creates 69 cents in GDP growth above the dollar received. On the other hand corporate tax breaks return less than their dollar value to the Canadian economy. Cuts to corporate income tax amount to only 30 cents in increased spending for each tax dollar not collected over 12 months.

Spending is linked to production by contracts signed across the economy. For instance, workers sign collective agreements with employers. When wages go up, more money is available to be spread throughout the economy. But, if workers are fearful for their jobs they may save, rather than spend. Pgs. 2, 3"Making Public Services a Priority National Union of Public General Employees December 2008

Deficits need to be absolved. Agencies have started to take action through Section 14 applications and by Societies taking legal action in the court system against the government regarding funding issues. There is no way for Children's Aid Societies to recoup deficits without service cuts and or appropriate funding. Children's Aid Societies have requested a Workload/Time/Services study be completed by the Government regarding the *reformation of the Child Welfare* system. This study is imperative to the

Field. Funding **MUST** be linked to the study or it will once again fall short of adequately addressing the chronic shortfall of funding in the Child Welfare system.

It is time for the Ontario Government to remember to “invest” in the future Children of this Province and continue to fund programs and Child Protection services which support our most vulnerable citizens. The timing of this investment is critical and urgent.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Pybus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rick Pybus
Chair
OPSEU Children's Aid Society Sector

Cc: Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister Children and Youth Services