

Media Release – November 30, 2010

25 in 5 Welcomes Social Assistance Review; Recommends Interim Steps

TORONTO -The 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction welcomes the news that Ontario's long awaited Social Assistance review will start in January and be led by two very able commissioners: Frances Lankin and Dr. Munir Sheikh.

“We're very pleased with the broad terms of reference for this review. It will provide recommendations not only on how to transform social assistance but on how it should connect to other income security programs that many of us need to rely on at some point in our lives, such as disability support programs and Employment Insurance,” said Jacquie Maund, Coordinator of Ontario Campaign 2000.

“This is the right thing to do for poverty reduction and for a strong Ontario economy. We want everyone to be able to achieve their full potential to contribute to our economy and society. Our income security system needs to be re-equipped to respond to economic pressures and support people through rough times – it's not doing that now. ”

The broad terms of reference for the review of social assistance show that the Ontario government listened to the advice of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council. They reflect the call for revamped income security programs to ensure that people receiving social assistance can live in dignity and be provided the supports and opportunities they need to move into the workforce if they are able to work.

“We are pleased with the choice of commissioners, Frances Lankin and Munir Sheikh. These are people with integrity who know the value of listening to the community and developing policy recommendations based on solid evidence. We encourage them to hear directly from people who are on the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs about the changes needed,” said Mike Creek, Co- Chair of 25 in 5.

This review will start in January and continue for 18 months. It will be supported by a commission of civil servants and poverty advisors. “An 18 month review gives the commissioners time to do the job right – but that should not stop the government from taking interim measures to respond to people's immediate needs. People across Ontario are struggling now to survive on extremely low social assistance rates. A single person receives only \$592/month. The 25 in 5 Network is calling for an immediate increase of \$100 a month for adults on social assistance,” said Jacquie Maund. “We also urge the Government to move forward on creating an Ontario Housing Benefit.”

Government also announced that it is looking to the 2008 Special Diets Expert Review Panel's report to improve the Special Diet allowance Program as an interim measure until the Social Assistance Review is complete.

“We see the Government's decision to include the Special Diet Allowance in the broader Social Assistance Review as a positive step,” says Mike Creek.

The 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction is a coalition that is endorsed by 1500 groups and individuals from across Ontario committed to a strong and effective Ontario poverty reduction plan.
www.25in5.ca

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Media Contact:

Jacque Maund, Coordinator, Ontario Campaign 2000
416-595-9230 ext. 241

Mike Creek, Co-Chair, 25in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction
416-697-4808