

## Template Letter for Concerned Citizens

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to express grave concern that your 2012 Budget eliminates the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) for people on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

As an active and proud citizen of the City of London, Ontario, I implore you to consider the negative impact this loss of funding will have on the people our programs serve on a daily basis – the most vulnerable citizens in our community who rely on OW and ODSP.

Three aspects of this benefit make it essential for people on social assistance. First, it is targeted to help these specific individuals. Second, it provides people with the direct assistance they need to retain their housing and prevent homelessness – it can help them pay their rent or utility arrears, or help them move to safer or more secure housing. Third, this benefit is mandatory – people that are denied are able to appeal this decision. This oversight ensures a measure of fairness for Ontarians with low-income and protects them from arbitrary decisions.

The CSUMB is a vital bridge for the clients we serve at Mission Services of London: the residents of the Men's Mission & Rehabilitation Centre, for the families residing at Rotholme Women's & Family Shelter and for those utilizing our Community Mental Health Programs. These individuals are striving towards a goal of independence and financial freedom. The assistance that this funding provides is critical in their success.

At Quintin Warner House, Mission Services of London's drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, graduates rely on the CSUMB to ensure a smooth transition into mainstream society. These individuals first come to Quintin Warner House from prison, from homelessness or from tragic circumstances; often, they have little to no support system to help them in their difficult journey. After graduation, they are stepping into situations where the opportunity for relapse is great and ultimate failure is a possibility. The CSUMB funding is crucial in a graduate's ability to secure the kind of living environment that is conducive to maintaining sobriety, and preventing relapse.

For the clients of Mission Services of London who are recipients of this funding, this mandatory benefit helps to relieve the stress of stepping into mainstream society: rental deposits, acquisition of furniture and basic needs and deposits on utilities. By disabling this program, the government of Ontario will be disabling the last resort for these vulnerable and excluded citizens.

As an example to point out the severity of these cuts, a single person receiving support through Ontario Works receives \$599 per month (as of July 2012). The average rental amount for a bachelor apartment in London in April 2012, according to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation was \$570.

The maximum CSUMB benefit for a single person is \$799 once every two years. The ability to use CSUMB funds as first or last month's rent is integral to homelessness prevention. The relevant figures for families paint an equally troubling picture.

It is my understanding that half the funds usually spent on the CSUMB will be combined with other housing related programs to create a new integrated fund. This fund will be administrated by municipalities who will allocate it as they see fit. As a citizen of London, I am concerned that the decision to give control of funds to municipalities will mean that the mandatory aspect, as well as the targeted aspect, of this benefit will be eliminated. People on assistance will be competing with other low income individuals and may not receive the support they need. Further, there will be no guarantee that the money will be paid directly to the people who need it. Municipalities may allocate the money to individual programs instead of continuing vital support to individuals in desperate need.

It is especially troubling that these cuts to social assistance benefits are being made just as the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance is about to issue its final report and recommendations. The cuts pre-empt, and may well undermine, the important process of reform that will arise out of the work of the Commission.

I strongly urge you to reverse this cut and restore full funding to these critical programs.

Sincerely,

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