

# the **Community Legal Fax**

## **F a c t s & F . A . Q . s**

an information newsletter published by Hamilton's Community Legal Clinics

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# City protects social service programs

## **Mayor Dilanni sends Province an invoice for \$19.5 million**

Downloading of social services was a disaster for Hamilton. In the late 1990s, the provincial government imposed 'Local Service Re-alignment' on Ontario's municipalities. The local tax base is now responsible for social services, public health programs, public transit, ambulance services and a host of other municipally funded, but provincially mandated services. Ontario is one of the few jurisdictions in the industrialized world that places social services on the property tax base. Hamilton has the second highest poverty rate in Ontario and bears greater social service costs than many of our neighbours. Quite simply, the City cannot afford the high social service costs. As a result, the City is facing a shortfall of at least \$19.5 million every year.

Programs and services for Hamilton's most vulnerable members are at risk because many of the programs people count on: home care for seniors, special needs devices for persons with disabilities and public health programs cannot be sustained through the City's limited tax base.

To address this inequity, Mayor Dilanni has taken a bold step in presenting the province with an invoice for \$19.5 million arguing that the City should not cut programs for Hamilton's most vulnerable citizens. One of the suggestions is to include Hamilton in the Greater Toronto Area Equalization Formula – an arrangement that would enable the City to pool social service costs with neighbouring municipalities that do not bear the same social service demands as Hamilton.

An online petition co-sponsored by Hamilton's community legal clinics and the Mayor's office has been set up on the City of Hamilton website.

[www.city.hamilton.on.ca/city-hall/mayor/social-service-pool](http://www.city.hamilton.on.ca/city-hall/mayor/social-service-pool)

The Petition entitled "Hamilton Needs Help" asks the province to re-consider the current funding arrangement for Hamilton's overwhelming social service costs.

The more people who sign the petition, the harder it will be for the provincial government to ignore Hamilton's significant needs.

## Provincial Rent Bank initiative will help vulnerable in Hamilton



The provincial government announced this month that they will be offering \$10 million to support and establish Rent Bank Programs. It is hoped the program "will help low income tenants with short-term arrears so they can stay in their

homes".

Hamilton's Housing Emergency Loan Program (HELP) has been assisting low-income tenants for several years. HELP's group of dedicated volunteers offers interest free loans to those who qualify to prevent individuals and families from falling into situations of homelessness. HELP hopes to coordinate efforts with the provincial initiative to assist even more people. It is far more cost effective for the community and the individual to maintain affordable housing than to deal with homelessness once it becomes a reality.

## LIFETIME BAN ON WELFARE FRAUD REPEALED

Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Pupatello announced in January that the province would repeal the lifetime ban on welfare fraud.

The abolition of the "zero-tolerance" policy for welfare fraud was one of 14 recommendations made by a coroner's jury following an inquest into the 2001

death of Kimberly Rogers in Sudbury. The jury said that depriving anyone of the means to obtain food and shelter has "a devastating and detrimental effect on our society."

The Income Security Advocacy Centre (a legal aid clinic that specializes in social assistance) sees this as only the first step in the direction of meaningful reform of not only the social assistance system, but also income security programs more broadly.

## Changes coming to the Tenant Protection Act

The McGuinty government expects to initiate consultations around changes to the ill-named Tenant Protection Act this spring. The Liberals have pledged to tear up the TPA and replace it with strong rent control legislation. Over the past six years, rents have been skyrocketing across the province – often increasing at 3 times the rate of inflation.

A research project compiled last year by Hamilton's Community Legal Clinics indicated that many tenants are confused by an extremely complex landlord-tenant dispute process at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal.

While the Tribunal offers the impression of a user-friendly approach, the reality is that there are systems that severely restrict tenants. Judith MacNeil, Executive Director of Dundurn Community Legal Services stated that the Tribunal process has been unfriendly to tenants in Hamilton: "the legislation has established barriers that make it difficult for tenants to be heard". The data for Southern Ontario shows that the large majority of all landlord applications for eviction resulted in default eviction orders...meaning tenants did not (or could not) defend themselves at a hearing and often lost their rental housing.

*Hamilton loses a friend...  
the Community loses a Strong Voice*

Hamilton's community legal



**clinics wish to express our deepest sympathy to the family, friends and constituents of MPP Dominic Agostino. Dominic was a true advocate for Hamilton's most vulnerable. One of Dominic's last announcements was the creation of two pilot projects that will create 60 units of affordable housing for low-income people in the City of Hamilton. The memory and good work of Dominic Agostino will be felt in our community for years to come. He will be missed.**