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ISAC UPDATE: May 30, 2008

Cuts hurt Kids Alert!

Starting in 2008, the Back-to-School and Winter Clothing allowances provided through OW and ODSP will no longer be paid out in lump sum payments, as the provincial government starts to move benefits for children out of social assistance and into the monthly Ontario Child Benefit program.

Families on OW and ODSP will be expected to save up to buy winter clothes and school supplies, despite the fact they won't receive the new Ontario Child Benefit until July - just a month before the new school year starts. But even if they had all year to save, it would be virtually impossible given how low social assistance rates are. The reality is that, even with the new Ontario Child Benefit, the majority of families on OW and ODSP will still be living in poverty.

In response to community outcry, the Ministry of Community and Social Services' OW Branch has issued an internal bulletin to municipalities and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSAB's) giving them the authority to use discretionary funding to provide families on OW and ODSP with a special benefit payment to make up for the Back-to-School and Winter Clothing allowance for this year only.

Take Action!

Provincially:

Tell your MPP and key ministers that you want the Back-to-School and Winter Clothing allowance to continue to be separate, mandatory, lump sum benefits for families on OW and ODSP. Asking municipalities to use discretionary funds for this year is not good enough, especially since some municipalities or DSSAB's may refuse, leaving families in those areas out of luck.

Raise this issue in any poverty reduction consultations happening in your community, in your written submissions to the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, or when answering questions on the government's poverty reduction website:
www.growingstronger.ca.

Get your Municipality, DSSAB, School Board or Public Health Board to pass resolutions calling on the province to restore the allowances. For a sample resolution, see: www.incomesecurity.org/documents/BacktoSchoolandWinterClothingAllowances-May2008.doc.

Also, ask your local District School Board and Student Trustees to support the Halton District School Board's resolution on this issue, as well as a separate resolution on increasing OW and ODSP rates, at the Ontario Public School Board Association's AGM on June 11/12 and the Ontario Student Trustee Association. Copies of the resolutions and accompany letters are attached and have already been sent to all public school boards.

Municipally:

Contact the manager of your local OW and ODSP offices or local municipal council and ask them to take action – if the province won't – to ensure families at least get the Back-to-School and Winter Clothing allowances this year.
