

Inquest into the Death of Kimberly Rogers

Suggested Recommendations of the Ontario Social Safety Network and the Steering Committee on Social Assistance

The OSSN and Steering Committee support all of the 21 suggested recommendations put forward by Coroner's Counsel. In addition, the OSSN and Steering Committee make the following suggestions for recommendations:

1. To recommendation #3 put forward by Coroner's Counsel, we would add:

The design and use of the social work report should be developed jointly by the following stakeholders: the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, the Steering Committee on Social Assistance, and the Ontario Social Safety Network, and should include a consideration of:

- privacy issues;
- the use of the report if there is a referral for prosecution;
- responsibility for the cost of the reports.

2. To recommendation #9 put forward by the Coroner's counsel we would add:

The allowance should be reviewed and adjusted annually in reference to the above-referenced data in order to take into account cost of living increases.

3. The definition of "income" under the Ontario Works Act and Regulations should be amended to exempt loans and other items that do not result in any net increase in resources for a recipient and which increase the recipient's debt load.
4. The definition of "income" under the Ontario Works Act and Regulations should be amended to exempt all National Child Tax Benefit payments.
5. The Ontario Works provincial policy which limits overpayment recovery to 5% of benefits, except where there is a clear ability to pay more, should be incorporated into all local Ontario Work policies. Overpayment recovery should never be at level to place a recipient at risk.
6. The current Ontario Works underpayment policy should be amended to ensure that recipients can recover the full amount of any underpayments actually owing to them and are not restricted to the current one-month recovery limit.

7. The Ontario Works program should ensure adequate support for post-secondary education, or whatever skills training is necessary, for an effective, long-term exit from social assistance. In order to identify the most appropriate and effective educational or skills training program, Ontario Works should provide individualized assessment and support for recipients, taking into account their personal circumstances, their characteristics, skills, and aptitudes. Client to caseworker ratios should be decreased to allow the necessary level of individualized assessment to achieve this objective.
8. In order to advance the objectives identified by the body recommended in Coroner's Counsel Recommendation # 5, (Social Assistance Advisory Committee) the government of Ontario should establish an Anti-Poverty Secretariat. As one of its responsibilities, the Secretariat should fund an anti-stigma campaign on the issue of poverty, to be designed and delivered in conjunction with social assistance recipients and community agencies.
9. The Attorney General should consider developing a pre- or post-charge diversion program for persons who may be or have been charged with welfare fraud. Such a program should be developed through consultation with the following:
 - crown prosecutors
 - police officers
 - community agencies who may be involved in administering the diversion programs
 - advocacy groups who work with persons on social assistance
 - Ontario Works local delivery agents
 - judges