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IMPORTANT MILESTONE FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE ANNOUNCED

TORONTO – The Ontario government’s announcements today on the social assistance review and special diet allowance program are both welcome steps forward on the road to improved income security for Ontarians.

“This is the bold and broad review that we’ve been looking for, led by two credible commissioners who we have confidence will lead an independent and thoughtful review process,” says Mary Marrone, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services for the Income Security Advocacy Centre.

“Frances Lankin brings solid social policy expertise. She led United Way Toronto’s efforts to unmask poverty in this city and to give the financial and policy support that help communities respond. Munir Sheikh has demonstrated his personal integrity, and his commitment to the independent research and data that are the foundations of evidence-based policy making.”

The review is important for low-income Ontarians as it opens up the possibility of moving away from the discredited Ontario Works model that has deepened poverty in the province. Ontario now has the opportunity to create an income security system that offers real, meaningful supports to people in need instead of humiliation and despair. And it has the possibility of bringing real improvements to the lives of people with disabilities who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program.

“A review of this scope and complexity takes time, but important improvements don’t have to wait,” says Marrone. “We’ll be urging government to include immediate and significant increases to incomes in its spring budget and to make the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council’s remaining recommended changes to current OW and ODSP rules, in order to make life better for people on assistance.”

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’re very pleased that government stepped back from their decision to cancel the program and that they are taking measures to bring the program into compliance with the Human Rights Code,” says Marrone. “This move extends the legal clinic system’s victory at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario to everyone on the Special Diet Allowance program.”

- 30 -