



Monday February 11, 2019

Dear members of the Budget Committee,

Thank you to the Chair and the Committee for the opportunity to depute today. My name is Ryan Noble and I am the Executive Director of North York Harvest Food Bank, the primary food bank for all of northern Toronto.

At this same time last year, I stood before many of you and told you that we were in a state of crisis.

I spoke to the 1 in 4 Torontonians living in poverty and to the nearly 1,000,000 food bank visits each year in this city. I said that in the inner suburbs of Toronto, food bank usage was up almost 50% since 2008.

And I told you that the average income of our food bank clients, about \$813 per month derived mainly from OW/ODSP, went primarily to rent and utilities and left an average of \$7.33 a day for food and all other expenses.

A year later, the picture is much the same.

Our clients still cannot afford to pay their rent *and* put enough food on their family's table. They are still skipping meals to pay their bills, purchase prescriptions and ensure their children don't go without.

But today, compounded the removal of rent controls on new buildings, the roll back of promised increases to social assistance, the abandonment of the commitments to employment standards laid out in Bill 168, the situation is even more dire.

I know that those were beyond your control, and that many of the costs keeping people in poverty – in particular housing – will require action from many levels of government, but they will directly and dramatically effect some of the most vulnerable people in **OUR** city, in **YOUR** city, and there are real changes that you *can* make that would have an immediate impact on families struggling with a low income.

I don't need to tell you what those changes are. You know the plan, because the plan is yours.

Four years ago the city's Poverty Reduction Strategy was unanimously endorsed by council, and we all celebrated. Articles were written about a "sweeping anti-poverty plan: and Toronto being a "leader in the collective pursuit of justice".

But the time for celebration has long passed. Four years later the Poverty Reduction Strategy has still not been given the funding it needs to succeed.

*please turn over...*

The amount of funding directly allocated to the PRS in the proposed 2019 Budget is just under \$12 million gross. Not only is this insufficient, but it represents the lowest level of new investment in poverty reduction since the strategy was adopted.

We cannot continue to relegate poverty to the side lines. Just as we must invest in our police force, in transit, in infrastructure, we must invest in poverty reduction. While we continue to put these investments off to another day, low-income Torontonians are paying the price. This is not how you build a world-class city.

We have a plan. What we need is investment. Only then will we see outcomes, progress and success. And we are standing by, ready to support the process with ongoing research and input from the front line.

You have made a commitment to the people of this city and we will continue to hold you accountable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan Noble', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan Noble  
Executive Director  
North York Harvest Food Bank