

Providence Centre Submission for 2023 Pre-Budget Consultations (Ontario Government)

Thank you for coming to Kingston for these consultations, and for your time and attention to our submission.

We are the leads on poverty, housing, climate change and the environment at the Providence Centre for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, which is a Catholic social justice office that carries on the legacy of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, an order of nuns who have served the Kingston community since 1861.

We are working for a world where all experience compassion, justice, and peace in solidarity with creation. In 2022, our office joined the Catholic Health Sponsors of Ontario, reflecting our capacity to address the social determinants of health in our community, and at the provincial and national levels.

We come before you today as experts in hearing and responding to the needs of our community. The government's priorities and spending plans do not meet the needs of Kingston, or the province. Our city is facing an affordable housing crisis, a drug poisoning epidemic, and a climate emergency. Unfortunately, the province's priorities and policies do not meet these vital needs. Today, we will provide comments and suggestions about how the province could better do so for Kingstonians and all Ontarians.

The government's housing strategy specifically fails to provide the type of affordable housing Ontarians need. Instead, we need the province to:

- Allocate money to build and retain affordable housing through
 - o Giving municipalities funding to build municipally owned, mixed income housing. Grants could cover the Rent geared to income and below market units. This can help reduce the social housing waitlists and also set up buildings with a self-sustaining income stream. Developers will not build housing that people living on low and fixed incomes can afford. We need the province to fund this.
 - o Developing a province wide program based off the Toronto's Multi Unit Residential Acquisition (aka MURA) program where non-profit housing providers can access funds for down payments and other supports to buy affordable lower rental units and keep them affordable. This helps protect existing housing stock. Each year in Ontario, 20,000 existing affordable rental units are lost.
 - o Renovate and improve the quality of existing social housing, especially to reduce energy consumption. Much of this housing was built between 1945 and 1990 therefore requires a lot of maintenance and renewal to keep those units in the housing system.

- Help cities build and operate supportive and transitional housing for different community needs such as people who use substances, people with disabilities and other needs. Some members of our communities need more than a rent geared to income or below market unit. They need supports to thrive. This is a critical piece to addressing the housing crisis for all needs. Funds are needed for both construction and operating costs. Good services need staff to meet community needs.

- Many people in Kingston are camping outside because they cannot find housing or even shelter that meets their needs. The recent Ontario Superior Court ruling from Justice Valente ruled that the Region of Waterloo can't evict an encampment of people who are unhoused because the region not only does not have enough beds to meet all the needs, but also the shelter spaces being offered do not meet the needs of people who are unhoused. Municipalities need the province to help pay for services that will meet current needs
- Invest in safer supply programs and safe injection sites across Ontario. People die every day in this province due to the drug poisoning crisis. Providing access to pharmaceutical grade drugs is saving lives and could save more. Everyone's life is important.

The government's decision to raise the minimum wage to \$15.50 last year was a positive step. However, it only partially mitigates the damage done when the government froze the minimum wage and scrapped many positive changes to Employment Standards introduced by the previous provincial government. The Ontario Living Wage Network has calculated a living wage for eastern Ontario to be \$19.05. Establishing the minimum wage as a living wage in Ontario would be enormously beneficial for Ontarians, health, people's ability to access and stay in housing, and local economies.

We were the first city in Ontario to declare a climate emergency. The government's budget and policies are failing to respond to the climate crisis, now and in the future, and the energy transition required to meet it.

- We have a massive program to retrofit homes in order to tackle our climate emissions. The program is so popular it has been oversubscribed. It needs additional funding.
- Our city is facing a massive electrification challenge as we shift away from a fossil fuel economy. We need funding for a new transformer, and other electrical infrastructure that will support a historic increase in electrical demand and distributed generation.
- Instead of investing in our future, the government is spending money on the past. The province is massively expanding gas plants in order to meet the province's future energy needs. This is incredibly wrongheaded. Our city, along with dozens of other Ontario municipalities, passed a council resolution asking the province to phase out gas fired power plants by 2030. Instead, the province is moving ahead with expensive, dirty power that will make it impossible to meet our net zero goals.
- Not only are the carbon emissions of gas plants worse, threatening to wipe out the progress we made cancelling coal, gas and new nuclear plants will cost far more than wind and solar. We need to invest in renewable energy production needs; energy efficiency, and energy storage to meet our future energy needs and climate responsibilities. This could include:
 - o Piloting Vehicle to Grid (V2G) technology as a means to make use of EV batteries as a storage resource for the grid
 - o Pilot advanced demand shifting - e.g., smart water heaters as dispatchable resources which let them be essentially thermal batteries
 - o investments in research and development for energy storage, long term (summer to winter) storage of the abundant energy we can collect in the summer for use heating our homes and businesses in the winter.

While the energy transition is necessary, it has to be done in a just way so that lower-income Ontarians are not left further behind. In that respect, there needs to be provincial incentives and

requirements for the largest landlords in the province to enhance energy efficiency and retrofits in rental buildings.

- Council here, responding to the desires of residents, recently stalled building new gas infrastructure for a new residential project. Unfortunately, the will of the people was blocked by archaic provincial regulations that require Utilities Kingston to provide gas infrastructure to any building that asks. Our local MPP has a private members' bill that would give cities choices here. We support this bill and would like new gas hookups to be phased out permanently.

Responding to climate change requires adaptation, not just mitigation. Ontario must enhance the building code and building standards about cooling to protect residents from heat deaths like like the over 600 BC suffered during the heat dome of 2021; create and enforce a maximum building temperature of 26C; and create programs and regulations to protect working Ontarians from extreme heat harms in the workplace. Ontario is heating up; the province must act.

Finally, in terms of adaptation, the greatest inheritance we can pass forward to future generations is a healthy, beautiful natural environment. This government consistently undervalues wetlands, forests, trees, water, clean air and living species. In 2018, green infrastructure provided over 8B dollars in revenue, and over 84,000 jobs. We should be investing in this sector and preparing for a climate-safe future, instead of turning our greatest gifts, including the Greenbelt, into inefficient, unaffordable sprawl.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission. A written copy will be provided to you.