



Provincial Pre-budget Submission

“Putting Ontario on the Road to Recovery”

to the Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy and the Budget Secretariat, Government of Ontario

From Bishop Andrew J. Asbil and the Social Justice & Advocacy Committee

Anglican Diocese of Toronto

135 Adelaide St. E., Toronto, Ontario M5C 1L8

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Anglican Diocese of Toronto is made up of some 200 parishes in communities across 26,000 square kilometres of south-central Ontario, extending beyond the City of Toronto to include communities such as Bolton, Collingwood, Penetanguishene, Haliburton and Brighton. As we continue to serve the spiritual and physical needs of hundreds of thousands of Ontarians, we also add our voice in support of public policies and investments to bring about positive systemic change for the most vulnerable in our communities and the land on which we all depend.

Here are our recommendations for the 2022 Provincial Budget:

Poverty Reduction:

- 1. Over the next five years, continue to raise the minimum wage until it approximates the average living wage in Ontario, and index it to inflation.**
- 2. Require employers to provide employees with 10 paid sick days per year on a permanent basis, with an additional 14 paid sick days during public health emergencies.**
- 3. Require employers to provide a minimum number of hours per week for each position and give employees adequate advance notice of work schedules.**
- 4. Require employers to pay part-time, temporary and casual workers the same rate as their permanent, full-time employees doing the same work.**
- 5. Sign on to the Federal-Provincial Childcare Agreement to bring affordable childcare to Ontario families and establish decent pay and working conditions for early childhood educators.**
- 6. Over the next five years, align social assistance rates with the Market Basket Measure (MBM) for each community, and index them to inflation thereafter, so that people on social assistance are able to meet their basic needs.**
- 7. Remove the artificial separation of social assistance benefits into basic needs and housing benefits.**
- 8. Remove the cap on provincially-funded Overdose Prevention Sites.**

Affordable Housing:

- 9. Implement rent control for all residential rental units in Ontario, including rent control on vacant units.**
- 10. Prioritize the creation and maintenance of permanently affordable rental housing, especially by municipal, non-profit and co-operative housing providers.**
- 11. Tax real-estate speculation and vacant residential units to cool the overheated housing market.**

Environmental Stewardship:

- 12. Protect Ontario's environment, food and water supply by keeping the Greenbelt free from development. In particular, resist the use of Ministerial Zoning Orders to override protections for agricultural land and environmentally significant areas**
- 13. Cancel the development of the 413 mega-highway and invest those dollars in expanding and improving public and regional transit.**

The Anglican Diocese of Toronto extends over 26,000 square kilometres of south-central Ontario, from Mississauga to Brighton and as far north as Midland and Haliburton. It includes the City of Toronto as well as smaller urban, suburban, and rural communities. Some 200 parishes in the Diocese serve the spiritual and physical needs of hundreds of thousands of Ontario.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Anglicans in our Diocese have shown an unprecedented level of generosity and commitment in responding to the needs of our communities. Our parishes and ministries offer food banks, community meal programs, clothing drives, emergency shelter, housing supports, and health care – including numerous COVID-19 vaccination clinics. However, public investment and policy change is necessary to address the systemic inequities, which predate the pandemic but which, in many cases, have been exacerbated by it. We add our voices in support of these measures, in the hope that Ontarians can emerge from the pandemic stronger, healthier, and better equipped to face the challenges ahead.

In keeping with our long-established social justice priorities of poverty reduction, affordable housing, and care for the environment, we recommend the following:

Poverty Reduction

Under the heading of poverty reduction, we have recommendations to make on wages and employment standards, affordable childcare, and social assistance, as well as on measures to address the worsening opioid crisis.

Employment

As it was one of our recommendations for the 2021 Budget, we were glad to see this government raise the minimum wage to \$15/hr effective January 1, 2022. However, it is worth noting that this increase still leaves low-income workers short of what they would now be receiving if the minimum wage had risen to \$15 in January 2019 as originally scheduled. Moreover, \$15/hr is still well below the living wage rate in any part of Ontario, which varies from \$16.30 in Thunder Bay to \$22.08 in Toronto.¹ **We urge this government to take steps over the next five years to bring the minimum wage rate up in line with the average living wage in the province, and index it to inflation thereafter.**

Many workers in Ontario face not only low wages but unfair working conditions which compromise their health and well-being and make it more difficult for them to get ahead. The lack of adequate paid sick day provisions forces workers to choose between losing essential income and going to work sick – unconscionable at any time but a grave threat to public health in a time of pandemic. This past year we have witnessed the explosion of workplace outbreaks of COVID-19 due to the lack of paid sick days for workers. While we acknowledge that this government has brought in a temporary measure to provide three paid sick days for reasons related to COVID-19, this provision is inadequate, temporary, and the eligibility requirements are overly complex. We join with organizations including the Decent Work and Health Network, the Daily Bread Food Bank, Ontario Campaign 2000, and others in calling for **legislation requiring 10 employer- paid sick days per calendar year, accessible to all workers, on a permanent basis.**² We also add our voices for **an additional 14 paid sick days in times of public health emergency, such as the current pandemic.**

¹ https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/living_wage_by_region

² <https://theonnc.ca/our-work/our-people/decent-work/paid-sick-days/>

Uncertainty over the number of hours of work and what one's schedule will be makes it difficult for workers to know how much money they will make, or to arrange childcare, never mind the ability to find supplementary income-earning opportunities or additional education and training for better jobs. This creates mental stress, jeopardizes the health of workers, and keeps them from being able to give their all to their work. Having to juggle more than one job because hours are uncertain at one workplace is one reason that COVID-19 was so easily spread in long-term care homes during the first wave, due to care workers working in multiple facilities. **Allowing workers to know the minimum number of hours they can expect from a particular job, and giving them reasonable advance notice of their schedules, would help them plan their childcare and other work or study arrangements, bringing greater stability into their lives.**

Finally, Ontario's employment legislation currently permits employers to legally pay part-time, temporary or contract workers less than full-time and permanent workers doing the same work. This creates an incentive for employers to continue to offer precarious jobs. **We call on your government to re-instate pay equity provisions for workers doing the same work, regardless of their employment status.**

A poverty reduction measure related to employment is access to quality, affordable childcare. Currently, Ontario is the only province in Canada which has not yet signed on to the federal childcare plan – yet families in Ontario, especially in Toronto, pay some of the highest childcare fees in the country. While we are encouraged that negotiations are ongoing, **we urge your government to sign on to the federal childcare plan as a matter of priority**, so that Ontario families have access to quality affordable childcare, allowing them to take on employment without breaking the family budget. This plan should also help ensure decent pay and working conditions for early childcare educators.

Social Assistance

Social assistance rates in Ontario continue to be abysmally low, with no increase in the rates since 2018 despite growing inflation. A recent report from the Maytree Foundation found that rates for four types of households (a single person considered employable, a single person with a disability, a single parent with one child and a couple with two children) were below Canada's poverty line in 2020, as measured by the Market Basket Measure (MBM) and indeed were in deep poverty (less than 75% of the MBM). A single person on Ontario Works received only 42% – less than half – of a poverty-line income.³ These deeply inadequate rates contribute to a loss of dignity for Ontarians on social assistance, forcing them to go without adequate food, clothing, and shelter, and causing them to fall further and further behind. **We recommend that, over the next five years, this government work to align social assistance rates with the Market Basket Measure (MBM) for each community, and index them to inflation thereafter, so that people on social assistance are able to meet their basic needs.**

A further inequity faced by people on social assistance in Ontario is that rates are divided into two parts: a basic needs allowance and a shelter allowance. The minimal increases to social assistance in the past decade have accrued to the basic needs portion of the benefit, leaving the shelter allowance farther and farther beneath the real cost of housing as rents increase. This means that fewer landlords are able to offer Rent-Geared-to-Income housing to social assistance recipients. Moreover, unhoused people on social assistance do not receive the shelter allowance, making it difficult for them to access housing

³ <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/ontario/>

options. **We join with social assistance recipients and income security advocates in recommending that social assistance basic needs and housing allowances be combined into a single benefit, giving more flexibility to recipients to access housing that meets their needs.**

Addressing the growing Opioid Epidemic

In the first year of this government's tenure, measures were taken to restrict the number of provincially licensed and funded overdose prevention sites (OPS) in the province. We wrote to this government in April 2019 in support of several existing OPS sites which had failed to receive provincial licenses and funding. Those sites continue to operate and save lives with support from the federal government. However, the opioid crisis continues to grow. While it has been eclipsed by the COVID-19 pandemic as the overwhelming public health crisis of our time, it has also been exacerbated by the pandemic. Since March 2020, the rate of fatal opioid overdose in Ontario increased by 60% and emergency medical services (EMS) for suspected opioid overdose increased by 57%, with "rural and Northern communities, people experiencing poverty or homelessness, people experiencing incarceration, and Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) communities seeing the largest relative increases."⁴ We have personally seen this increase in opioid overdose in our ministries and parish outreach programs – not only in downtown Toronto, but in smaller communities across the Diocese. **We therefore urge this government to remove the cap on the number of provincially-funded Overdose Prevention Sites in Ontario.**

Affordable Housing

Housing costs continue to rise for Ontarians, placing an increasing burden on low-income families. Despite the implementation of modest financial penalties for landlords evicting tenants in bad faith, tenants continue to be subject to "renovictions," particularly when they are unaware of their rights or have difficulty enforcing them due to the Landlord Tenant Board process moving online. Once tenants are evicted, landlords are free to charge incoming tenants whatever the market will bear, leaving an ever-shrinking supply of affordable rental housing available to those who are displaced, and pushing more and more people into homelessness.

Vacancy decontrol and exemption of new rental housing from rent control were originally touted as ways to increase the supply of rental housing, including affordable rental housing. However, the construction of new rental housing continues to lag well behind demand⁵, while these exemptions from rent control, especially vacancy decontrol, result in a net loss of affordable rental units in the province. **For this reason, we urge your government to eliminate vacancy decontrol and reinstate rent controls on ALL residential rental units in Ontario.**

A better way to encourage the building of new affordable housing in Ontario is to reduce the barriers to creation and maintenance of permanently affordable rental housing, particularly by municipal, non-profit, and co-op housing providers. Because these housing providers do not need to meet a built-in profit margin, every dollar of their investment can be put toward creating units and keeping them affordable. **We urge your government to streamline the process for such developers, first by waiving development charges and other government levies on these developments, and secondly by**

⁴ <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-opioid-related-harm-in-ontario/>

⁵ <https://www.acto.ca/vacancy-decontrol-what-is-it-and-why-does-it-matter/>

increasing funding to provide upfront financing for public, non-profit and co-op providers to get these developments off the ground quickly. Thirdly, we recommend setting aside funding for landlords of affordable housing (including private landlords) to make needed repairs and retrofits to existing housing stock without having to pass these costs on to their low-income tenants.

Finally, we urge your government to explore new and expanded taxation measures to cool the overheated housing market. Real estate investors now make up over 25% of homebuyers, pushing prices beyond the reach of Ontario families.⁶ **Some level of tax on real estate speculation, even for domestic investors, combined with a tax on vacant properties, could help to mitigate the pressures of speculation on housing costs in Ontario.** If housing is chiefly seen as a financial asset to increase the wealth, it become impossible for the average person – much less those who struggle to get by on lower incomes – to realize their right to a home.

Environmental Regulation

Ontarians do not live by development alone – even the development of permanently affordable housing! We also rely on local food and water sources, as well as on flourishing ecological spaces that help mitigate the effects of climate change by cleaning our air and water, reduce flooding, provide crucial wildlife habitat, and spaces for Ontarians to connect with nature and enjoy recreational activities. According to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 175 acres of farmland in the province are lost to development every day.⁷ The use of Ministerial Zoning Orders to override agricultural zoning use and environmental protections has accelerated during this government’s tenure. Yet once prime agricultural and ecologically protected land is lost to development, it cannot be replaced, leaving future Ontarians less resilient, more dependent on sources outside the province for food and drinking water, and more vulnerable to climate change-related natural disasters. Such a course will impoverish future Ontarians not only financially but in terms of health and well-being and biodiversity. It does not make good economic sense even in the short term, since the cost of infrastructure for greenfield development far exceeds that related to intensified or infill development.⁸

Adding a new mega-highway, such as the planned Highway 413, will accelerate urban sprawl and lead to higher levels of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, without easing traffic congestion long-term.⁹ This is especially misguided, considering our need to do all we can to lower our contribution to climate change, so as to avoid even more catastrophic climate impacts. Investing in public transit at the local and regional levels will help ease congestion at the same time as reducing our environmental impact.

For these reasons, we urge your government to protect the Greenbelt from development; to resist using MZO’s to override existing agricultural zoning and environmental protections; and to scrap plans for Highway 413, choosing instead to invest those dollars in public and regional transit.

⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/investors-in-ontario-real-estate-market-1.6258199>

⁷ <https://homegrown.ofa.on.ca/story/>

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/urban-expansion-costs-menard-memo-1.6193429>

⁹ <https://www.thestar.com/life/2021/12/06/highway-disease-doctors-prescribe-saying-no-to-highway-413-development>

Conclusion

As we look forward to emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, we all want to build an Ontario which is healthier and more resilient. We want all Ontarians to share in the recovery and renewal of our province. We urge your government to include these recommended measures in your 2022 Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Andrew J. Asbil, Bishop of Toronto

and

The Social Justice & Advocacy Committee, Diocese of Toronto