



April 18, 2024

The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier  
Room 281,  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford,

I am writing on behalf of Anglicans across the Diocese of Toronto in response to your government's 2024 Budget, "Building a Better Ontario."

In our January 2024 pre-budget submission, we called for provincial policies and investments to support low-income Ontarians, create and maintain affordable housing, and steward our environment. While Budget 2024 does contain some welcome policy and funding announcements, it falls short of what is needed to address the challenges we face as a province, and which are disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable among us.

### **Poverty Reduction:**

Ontarians struggling to survive on low incomes continue to be largely ignored by this budget, with a few exceptions.

We were pleased to see expanded access to and indexation of the Guaranteed Annual Income System (GAINS) benefit for low-income seniors, as was announced in last year's budget. This will help more Ontario seniors make ends meet. Recipients of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) will likewise see their core allowances adjusted for inflation, though the amount received by ODSP recipients is still below the deep income poverty threshold. The worst off continue to be those individuals and families depending on Ontario Works, whose rates have been frozen since 2018, during which time the cost of essential goods and services has increased by 18%. OW recipients are now \$200 per month worse off, adjusted for inflation, than they were after the Harris government cuts in 1995. This leaves social assistance recipients unable to meet basic needs for food and shelter, exacerbating the demand on food banks and the increase in homelessness. Still less can social assistance recipients afford digital access, despite the increasing digitization of the social assistance application and delivery process.

Some Ontario workers will benefit from this budget's introduction of a target benefit framework for multi-employer pension plans. Yet there continues to be no announcement of paid sick days for all Ontario workers, despite most low-income workers not being covered by employer-paid plans, and despite paid sick leave being associated with higher employee productivity, engagement and retention. Similarly, while the indexation of the minimum wage will bring Ontario's minimum wage



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from \$16.55 to \$17.20 per hour in October, this remains under the living wage anywhere in Ontario, particularly in south-central Ontario which has the majority of the population, and where a living wage would be between \$20.60 and \$25.05 per hour.

### **Housing & Homelessness:**

There is some very positive news in Budget 2024 for housing. The \$2 billion in investments in municipal housing infrastructure, housing-enabling water systems and the Building Faster Fund will provide much-needed funding to municipalities to create new housing and all that goes with it. The Budget also empowers (but does not require) municipalities to impose taxes on vacant units and to lower property taxes on purpose-built rentals. As well, the announcement of an additional \$152 million over the next three years to expand access to supportive housing through rent supplements and the funding of operating agreements, is a very welcome complement to the funding for homelessness prevention announced in last year's budget.

The recently-introduced Bill 185, "Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024," puts more money back into municipal coffers by limiting development charge exemptions to the development of affordable housing, and encourages increased density by eliminating parking minimums near transit and reducing barriers to the creation of laneway, basement, and garden suites. It is mystifying, however, that this commitment to increased density stops short of allowing fourplexes as-of-right in residential neighbourhoods, particularly when refusal to do so jeopardizes Ontario's access to federal housing accelerator funding.

The budget also expresses provincial commitments to using surplus provincial properties to support the creation of "attainable" housing, and to "embracing" modular housing. However, without a definition of "attainable" housing or a concrete plan or funding commitment to modular housing projects, it is hard to evaluate the impact of these statements.

Where Budget 2024 falls short is in any specific commitment to the creation of new affordable housing. Ontario has fallen so far behind on meeting its affordable housing targets that we are in danger of losing \$357 million in federal funding. Moreover, there is no mention of any policy change that would help to keep existing units affordable, such as rent control on newer units, vacancy controls, or a limitation on back-to-back above-guideline rent increases. This spring, 68% of the parishes in our Diocese voted in favour of calling on your government to introduce such measures to help realize the human right to housing in our province. We have seen the fallout in our own communities as more and more people find themselves struggling to keep up with soaring housing costs.

### **Environment:**

Budget 2024 contains some welcome news for the environment in the form of significant investments in public and regional mass transit, the manufacture of electric vehicles and low-emissions steel, and even the creation of a new provincial park in the township of Uxbridge.



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However, we are disappointed that the province is going ahead with the building of Hwy 413 and Bradford Bypass despite their impact on key farmland and wildlife habitat, and the fact that these projects will have a negligible effect on congestion in the long term. We are also concerned that Bill 185, together with the proposed Provincial Planning Statement, would effectively override protections for farmland, wetlands and wildlife habitat against low-density urban sprawl, development which does not serve Ontarians in the greatest need of housing.

Budget 2024 also obfuscates Ontario's commitment to "clean" energy, as on closer inspection, most of the funding outlined is committed to expanded nuclear power generation instead of wind, solar, or hydropower. While nuclear power does not directly produce greenhouse gas emissions, it presents the risk of catastrophic health and environmental effects both in operations and in storage of waste, so it can hardly be called "clean." Nuclear power is also costlier and takes longer to build than true clean energy alternatives.

Much has been said about how this is Ontario's biggest budget and involves a substantial deficit. Yet Ontario's program spending per capita is lowest of all the provinces, 25% lower than the average of all other provinces in Canada. Moreover, revenue reductions by this government over the past five years have resulted in a loss of \$7.7 billion in provincial revenues: funds which could have been invested in improving public programs and services, particularly to those who need them most. Some of these revenue reductions are targeted to low-income households, such as the expanded access to the Ontario Electricity Support Program, but others, such as the gas tax cuts, driver's licence fee freeze and retroactive elimination of licence plate renewal fees, are not, benefiting wealthier Ontarians more than their low-income neighbours.

We cannot shrink our way to greatness. The growing number of Ontarians who are struggling to meet their everyday needs deserve a government that invests in them, to build a better Ontario for us all.

Yours in Christ,

The Right Reverend Andrew J. Asbil  
Bishop of Toronto

Social Justice & Advocacy Committee, Anglican Diocese of Toronto