



END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

March 5, 2010

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, MPP
Minister of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Meilleur,

On behalf of our 66 partner organizations, Ontario Campaign 2000 would like to express our strong concern about a recent memo circulated by the directors of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program about the Special Diet Allowance Program. The directors' memo, dated February 25, highlights but does not deny a rumour that your government is considering eliminating the Special Diet Allowance Program.

The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario recently determined that the way the Special Diet Allowance Program is administered discriminates against the three complainants whose cases were brought forward. The Tribunal's decision confirms the importance of this program to the special nutritional needs of the many Ontarians it serves.

Ontario Campaign 2000 wants to ensure that the Special Diet Allowance Program is maintained and strengthened. Any weakening of the Special Diet Allowance Program would only exacerbate poverty for many Ontario families and children. For example, a single mother with one child receiving Ontario Works benefits still lives \$5000 below the poverty line. If that child or parent has a medical condition which requires a special diet, this family's finances will be unable to compensate. Further, the elimination of the program would be seen as premature in light of the work of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (SARAC) and the upcoming Social Assistance Review, as promised in the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

No major changes should be made to Ontario's social assistance system until you and your government have had an opportunity to review the system as a whole and hear from the SARAC.

Sincerely,

Jacquie Maund
Coordinator, Ontario Campaign 2000