



Brief of the
Ontario Teachers' Federation

to the
**Standing Committee on Human Resources and
Social Development and the Status of Persons
with Disabilities regarding the Study on the
Federal Contribution to
Reducing Poverty in Canada**

June 2, 2009



Child Poverty in Ontario

The Ontario Teachers' Federation is the advocate for the teaching profession in Ontario and for its 155,000 teachers. OTF members are full-time, part-time and occasional teachers in all the publicly funded schools in the province—elementary, secondary, public, Catholic and francophone.

As educators in Ontario, we are dedicated to the education of all students, regardless of their background or their financial or social circumstances with a goal of making a difference. There are many external factors and conditions that affect a child's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to support that learning, but none as critical or complex as child poverty.



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Ontario is both the largest economy in Canada and one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world. Unfortunately, however, almost one out of every six children is growing up in poverty, translating to over 478,000 children under the age of 18 living in poverty.

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Children who come to school hungry, dressed poorly or ill cannot concentrate in class. This is the beginning of a vicious cycle where children are not successful in school, become disengaged and, often years later, leave school without graduating. Poverty and income inequality affect all members of society, but have much longer-lasting effects on children.

The poverty rate in Ontario has not dropped below the 1989 rate of 11.6% and has, in fact, increased to almost 18% in 2004. This does not bode well for the 1989 unanimous resolution in the House of Commons to end child poverty.

Other alarming statistics include:

- Almost half of the children living in poverty across Canada live in Ontario.
- The income gap between rich and poor families has reached a record high.
- 132,000 children rely on a food bank every month, representing 40% of food bank users.

- Poverty among immigrants has steadily increased to 60% over the past 20 years.
- 70% of children living in poverty live in families with at least one working parent.
- The average one-parent, low income family is living \$9,500 below the poverty line.
- The average two-parent, low income family is living \$11,000 below the poverty line.
- The poverty rates for children from Aboriginal, racialized, immigrant and one parent (mother) families are double the average rate.

There are many reasons for the increase in child poverty including: deterioration in social assistance programs; skyrocketing inflation rates and severe limits imposed on the National Child Benefit Supplement. Additionally, immigrants often end up in lower-paying jobs due to the barriers they face relating to international credentialing. In Canada, the ongoing lack of co-ordination between federal and provincial governments has resulted in severe underfunding for many social programs that would ordinarily support marginalized groups.

Campaign 2000 released a discussion paper in 2007 outlining a poverty reduction strategy developed specifically for Ontario. Solid government leadership is required, however, and in these uncertain economic times, the government in Ontario appears to be focused on other pressing issues.

Ontario could expand upon the programs from other jurisdictions, for example Quebec and



Educators and schools are very influential partners for increasing students' chances at living productive lives as responsible citizens.



Newfoundland/Labrador, by developing measures to assist families, such as:

- raising the minimum wage and ensuring there are good jobs paying more than poverty wages;
- strengthening the social safety net with income support programs;
- investing in affordable child care, housing and post-secondary tuition.



Every day, classroom teachers and support staff see the impact that poverty has on the lives of these children. Some of the characteristics of poverty that teachers see and have reported on include:

- students who move and change schools frequently because there is insufficient money for rent;
- students who withdraw from the shame or lash out in anger;
- students who suffer from low self-esteem and lack of confidence – especially in high school;
- students who demonstrate an attitude of hopelessness.

Children who live in poverty are marginalized both in and out of school. All children deserve to live and learn with dignity, free from poverty, socially and economically secure. When they are no longer victims of poverty, only then will factors other than socio-economic status be the important determinants of educational and social outcomes.



In 2007, Campaign 2000, in its *Ontario Discussion Paper*, pointed out that the strong economy of the day was not solving the child poverty problem. It is inevitable, that unless governments act, the current economic situation will make the issue of child poverty even more dire.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation is supportive of the goals of the National Council of Welfare and Campaign 2000 in working to eradicate child poverty. We look to the Federal Government to do its part in addressing its responsibilities in the areas of employment insurance, child care and appropriate minimum wage across the country.

THE STATISTICS CITED IN THIS REPORT COME FROM:

Child Poverty in Ontario – Promises to Keep, 2006
Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario, Campaign 2000

Statistics Canada (2007). Income Trends in Canada, 2005

Colour of Poverty, Fact Sheet, 2007

