

NEWS RELEASE

October 3, 2019

Contact: Suzanne Van Bommel

(647) 309-0015 suzanne@thegpsgroup.ca

Province Reverses All Social Service Cuts But One: Nine At-Risk Adult Children With Autism

TORONTO, ON — When former Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Lisa McLeod, assumed leadership of her portfolio in June 2018, one of her first orders of business was to make massive, devastating cuts to programs and budgets that ensured the wellbeing of some of the Province's most-vulnerable individuals. Children's aid societies' budgets were slashed by \$28 million and plans were made for the \$67 million social services Child Benefit to be eliminated altogether. Additionally, immense cuts were made to the Province's autism program, eradicating critical services and funding, and creating chaos for children on the autism spectrum and their families.

At the same time the government decimated the children's autism program, it also terminated court-ordered funding for a group of seven families and their nine adult children with autism. These parents had successfully sued the province in 2004 against its discriminatory age six cut-off from autism supports. Consequently, their children had been receiving court-ordered government-funded specialized care and support for over 15 years thereafter. All of these families' children have severe autism and complex special needs. As a result of losing their vital and highly specialized supports, they are now all at tremendous risk of not only significant regression, but physical harm.

As a response to public outcry over the draconian cuts that left thousands of vulnerable Ontarians stranded, Minister Todd Smith reversed all prior cuts made by his predecessor - including restoring funding for the children's autism program. Today, the Ministry announced it was revoking additional cuts to social assistance and children's aid, that when combined, amount to roughly \$95 million. These seven families, however, were left out.

"While we are pleased to see that Premier Ford is clearly back-peddalling on all the aggressive cuts his government made earlier this year," says Suzanne Van Bommel, spokesperson for the families, "we are devastated that he has overlooked one important group: these nine kids." Van Bommel says she cannot understand why the government is picking a fight with these families in crisis, especially given the fact that the funding was not only court-ordered, but also committed to them by way of a promissory letter written by a high-ranking Ministry official back in 2007.

These families endeavoured for six months to resolve the crisis in which they now find themselves - a crisis created by the Ford government. But discussions with MCCSS and Developmental Services Ontario have been fruitless and families find themselves with no other option but to sue the government for breach of contract, acts of negligence and bad faith, and violation of Sections 7 and 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

“We really don’t want to be litigants,” says Brenda Deskin, one of the plaintiffs. “We’re just parents trying to take care of our severely compromised kids. We planned our lives based on the promises the government made to us.” Continues Deskin, “There’s still time for the government to live up to its word.” Pleads Deskin to the Premier, “Mr. Ford, we implore you to do the right thing and reinstate our kids’ funding. Please do not make us have to go back to court.”

The families have served the government with the requisite 60 days Notice of Intent to Sue. Should the government not live up to its promises and obligations, within two months they will have no choice but to once again turn to the courts in their pursuit to help their children.

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Relevant Links:

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-families-sue-government-a-second-time-over-autism-funding-1.4619389>

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2019/09/27/families-suing-ontario-government-over-cuts-to-autism-services.html>

<https://www.iheartradio.ca/newstalk-1010/audio/podcasts/september-29-2019-families-suing-ontario-government-over-cuts-to-autism-services-1.10021807>

20 minute 40 second mark

<https://omny.fm/shows/the-craig-needles-show/reacting-to-foco-festivities-examining-homelessnes>

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-families-sue-government-a-second-time-over-autism-funding-1.4619389>