

Eugene Levy speaks out on behalf of “Autism Warriors” cut off by Ford Government

TORONTO, ON — When Eugene Levy recently learned about the unfortunate predicament of his cousin, Michael, he couldn't stay silent. Michael, who is on the autism spectrum, received the help of his famous cousin as a young boy when his family struggled to get the critical support needed to manage his complex special needs. Once again Eugene felt the need to lend his voice to autism advocacy, this time directed to the plight of their children with severe autism who are all now young adults.

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 this 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 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. In early October, the Ministry announced it was revoking additional cuts to social assistance and children's aid, that when combined, amount to roughly \$95 million. Surprisingly however, these seven families were left out.

“I am absolutely heartbroken for these families,” says Levy. He continues, “Life is difficult enough for these parents and their high-needs children. It is time that our government starts working with them instead of against them.”