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November 21, 2008

Re: 2009 Pre-Budget Consultations

I am writing on behalf of St. Stephen's Community House, a multi-service social agency that has been serving the inner-city neighbourhoods of Kensington Market, Alexander Park, Chinatown and the Annex since 1962. We provide a wide range of programs for 32,000 people each year who are the most vulnerable in our society – low-income children, at-risk youth, immigrant seniors, newcomers to Canada, people who are homeless, the unemployed and people living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the province's upcoming budget..

St. Stephen's Community House is also active in many partnerships such as the Toronto Coalition of Youth Centres, a committee of Toronto Neighbourhood Centres. TNC is an association of 30 non-profit multi-service organizations dedicated to strengthening local neighbourhoods and enabling diverse communities to work together to foster safe, healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods

The Toronto Coalition of Youth Centres promotes the essential work of youth drop-in and resource centres in neighbourhoods across Toronto and the need for these centres to be in every neighbourhood across the province. We have been working cooperatively with Town Youth Participation Strategies and Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario to advocate for this. We also support the Youth Policy Alternatives Campaign of United Ways of Ontario who are calling for a comprehensive provincial youth policy framework

This is an important year for the Province of Ontario with groundbreaking provincial reports with recommendations and plans on Poverty Reduction and the Roots of Youth Violence. St. Stephen's Community House strongly endorses the Roots of Youth Violence Report and congratulates the province for commissioning it. We would like to play an active role in advising on the implementation of the recommendations as we have considerable experience and expertise to share in innovative and effective youth prevention programming.

Pre-Budget Consultation Questions:

**1. During this period of global economic uncertainty and fiscal challenges, what should the Ontario's government's top priorities be for the 2009 Budget?**

The top priorities for the 2009 Budget should be reassuring the province on our economic well-being and future and investing in long-term social and economic infrastructure. The Roots of Youth Violence recommendations cover many areas of long-term social development, many of which do not have significant financial implications. These include:

(1) Establishing a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and Anti-Racism to develop a comprehensive, province-wide Youth Policy Framework. We strongly recommend and sincerely hope that this cross-ministerial committee will include associate members from voluntary sector organizations serving youth, as well as young people from both urban and rural communities; (2) In concert with Municipalities, providing investments to support the development and of community hubs where none exist and, (3) providing core funding for existing youth initiatives which are currently in place but not adequately funded.

**2. During challenging economic times, should the Ontario government strive to achieve a balanced budget or run a deficit in order to protect priority programs and services?**

The vulnerable people we serve at St. Stephen's – children, youth, seniors, people who are homeless, people who are unemployed, people with disabilities – need the most protection in tough times. They feel the most suffering in times of high unemployment. It is appropriate and necessary to run a deficit in order to protect vital services and entitlements. In times like these, demand for social services and supports increase, therefore, it is essential to not only maintain existing services but where feasible, to enhance them.

**3. Given the current fiscal challenges, what government programs could be delayed, phased in more slowly or eliminated?**

There are many urgent demands on the provincial budget. It will be impossible to meet all demands without looking at some of the largest ministries, including the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and Ministry of Education and the province has already announced some items to be delayed. St. Stephen's Community House supports expansion of community care as a lower cost and high quality of life alternative to residential care for many health and social issues including many hospital and nursing home stays for seniors and people with disabilities, and

incarceration for young offenders. We support a variety of crime prevention, court diversion and mediation alternatives to policing, criminal charges and court costs.

**4. What further steps can the Ontario government take to promote economic growth and job creation?**

St. Stephen's Community House is active in the Employment Ontario program and we encourage the continued system improvements that have been happening over the last few years, including increases in youth training, apprenticeship opportunities and the Second Career strategy. Fully implementing the Student Success Strategy for 85% of youth to complete Grade 12 is a wise investment.

**5. How can the Ontario government work more effectively with other levels of government and other key partners during challenging economic times?**

Ontario must continue to advocate for a fair deal in the Canadian confederation. Inequities on equalization payments and especially in Employment Insurance, place Ontario residents at a great disadvantage. Ontario needs to work hard in renegotiating Federal-Provincial agreements including the immigration agreement and labour market agreement to support Ontario control of resources. A key government partnership program that we recommend be revived is the Community and Neighbourhood Services Support Program (CNSSP). It is highlighted in the Roots of Youth Violence report as a mechanism to address youth issues and youth hubs. With the CNSSP, the province, the municipality and the local community or United Way cooperated and cost-shared on essential neighbourhood support services and infrastructure.

St. Stephen's Community House appreciates the opportunity to consult on the provincial budget. We strongly endorse the Roots of Youth Violence Report and would like to assist your government in implementing the recommendations. We hope to see these recommendations featured in the 2009 Provincial Budget. For more information, please feel free to contact me at 416-871-9484 or [sbill@ststephenshouse.com](mailto:sbill@ststephenshouse.com) or Liane Regendanz, Executive Director, at [rliane@ststephenshouse.com](mailto:rliane@ststephenshouse.com) 416-925-2103 ext. 239.

Sincerely,

Bill Sinclair  
Associate Executive Director