



Hon. Todd Smith  
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
7th Floor  
438 University Ave.  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2K8

April 14, 2020

Re: Social assistance clawbacks

Honourable Minister,

On behalf of United Ways across Ontario and the community members we serve through our network of agencies, thank you for the leadership that you and the Ford government have shown during such a challenging and unprecedented time for Ontarians. We appreciate the steps the government has taken to support the province's most vulnerable community members, including expanded access to the emergency assistance program administered by Ontario Works and additional supports you have invested in the social services sector.

These measures are helping our municipal and agency partners to strengthen local efforts to ensure that necessities like food, rent, shelter and medicines are getting to the people who are most in need. This collective effort includes enabling families to access supports like counselling and youth outreach during the pandemic.

We are writing today as United Ways across Ontario to request that there be no clawbacks to any extra income support Ontarians on social assistance may receive during the pandemic. This concern is especially true for those receiving the federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). In order to acknowledge the exceptional challenges of social assistance recipients continuing to work through this pandemic, we are requesting that clawbacks on employment earnings for all social assistance recipients be suspended for the length of CERB income support. Given the transient nature of work under the COVID lockdown, this measure will help bring life stabilization and fairness for all workers on social assistance, regardless of whether they are working more hours, fewer hours or have been completely laid off.

COVID is tough for most people, but for those who were already struggling with low-incomes it can be devastating. That is why any additional support United Way, our network of agencies, the social services sector and all levels of government can provide will help to keep Ontarians in good health and housing and ready to help get our economy back on its feet as soon as this pandemic is over.

Those on social assistance and other low-income Canadians face significant challenges in finding employment under normal labour market conditions, and a labour market that is expected to drastically change post-COVID would likely create more barriers for them in accessing the kind of skills training employers will need. Therefore, it is critical that Ontarians on social assistance keep as much of the money they are receiving in their pockets so they can pay for life's necessities now, stay healthy and out of shelters and hospitals and be ready to invest in their upskilling and job search when the economy needs them.

Those who would benefit from such a decision are the Ontarians who were working before the pandemic cost them their employment income and are most likely return to work once Ontario is open for business again. If they can remain adequately housed, in good health and have the ability to come out of the pandemic with their life's necessities taken care of, they are most likely to succeed in the labour market. Therefore, we request that our government support them by eliminating any clawbacks that would limit their ability to bounce back from this pandemic. Thank you again for the support and leadership you have shown to those most impacted by this pandemic in Ontario.

Sincerely,

Michael Allen  
President & CEO  
United Way East Ontario

Penny Barton Dyke  
Executive Director  
United Way for the City of  
Kawartha Lakes

Dale Biddell  
Chief Executive Officer  
United Way Simcoe Muskoka

Albert Brulé  
Chief Executive Officer  
United Way of Thunder Bay

Trish Buote  
Executive Director  
United Way Leeds & Grenville

Francesca Dobbyn  
Executive Director  
United Way of Bruce Grey

Ryan Erb  
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