

November 14, 2016

London City Council
300 Dufferin Avenue
London, ON N6A 4L9

Re: City of London Budget for 2017

Dear Members of Council

Neighbourhood Legal Services is a poverty law clinic assisting low income individuals/families who reside in London and Middlesex County with legal issues in the following areas:

- Ontario Works ("OW")
- Ontario Disability Support Program ("ODSP")
- Canada Pension Plan Disability
- Landlord/Tenant
- Employment Law
- Criminal Injuries Compensation

Due to the nature of our work, we are regularly made aware of the challenges and difficulties that low income individuals/families encounter. Part of the clinic's mandate is law reform, and ensuring that the interests and concerns of low income Londoners/Middlesex County residents [those on social assistance, fixed-income, working poor] are made known and are taken into consideration in the area of public policy.

Founded in 1989, by a group of sole-support parents, LIFE*SPIN has grown to become one of London's leading champions of those struggling to provide for their families in poverty, with more than 5000 families assisted each year. LIFE*SPIN invites the citizens we serve to take an active part in helping create sustainable supports that help each other to get back on their feet and create hopeful futures for their families. These supports include:

- assisting with Housing applications
- completion of forms for ODSP, CPP Disability, CPP OAS/GIS, etc
- obtaining medical records to support successful disability applications
- e-filing personal income taxes for low-income Londoners (year-round)
- providing vouchers for Sleep Country, Mission Store and Health Access Vouchers
- Free Store that provides free clothing, housewares, linens, and other housing items
- "Large Item Donor Registry" matching donors of furniture/appliances directly to clients
- 10 units of permanent affordable housing (currently housing 16 people)
- "Living Room" ~ a thriving community space that serves as an access point for healthy food, wellness, education, children's programs, youth programs, neighbourhood arts and culture, and social change

- and information and referrals to funded programs that meet special service needs

LIFE*SPIN has operated the housing initiative as a Community Economic Development initiative since 2000, utilizing business means to create sustainable benefits to our community.

LIFE*SPIN recognizes that poverty is a result of systemic injustice in our society and works towards a fairer and more equitable structure that may alter the future of many lives, particularly those struggling to survive in poverty.

Neighbourhood Legal Services and LIFE*SPIN co-chair the London Community Advocates Network. The London Community Advocates Network is comprised of approximately 50 community agencies who assist recipients of OW and ODSP benefits. We meet as a group on a quarterly basis with staff from both program areas to provide input regarding local and provincial issues and policies affecting the vulnerable population that we serve. Due to our involvement with the London Community Advocates Network, we are keenly aware of how difficult it has been for low-income Londoners to meet their basic needs and the shortfalls/gaps in current programs such as the Discretionary Benefits program and the Housing Stability Bank.

In light of the above, Neighbourhood Legal Services and LIFE*SPIN would like to make the following comments and share our main concerns with respect to the 2017 Annual Budget Update.

1. Operating Budget Amendments - (For Consideration - Permanent)

There are 2 Operating Budget Amendments that we submit should be accepted by Counsel and become part of the budget, them being:

a. LHMC - Building and Maintenance and Tenant Services

The request by London and Middlesex Housing Corporation for an increase in operating budget to meet the increase in demand for emergency building repairs, pest control, et al should be endorsed for the following reasons:

- those residing in London housing units should be able to reside in safe and adequate units
- the London Housing units are getting older and thus maintenance/repair costs will increase
- one of the Mayor's Poverty Panel recommendations was "leverage funding and investing in the regeneration of existing London and Middlesex Housing Corporation properties"
- the experience for agencies that assist individuals who live in London Housing units is that the issues related to bed bugs is a growing problem and that there are very limited resources in the community to assist individuals to adequately deal with bed bugs
- London Housing's recent building assessment shows the need for additional funds for repair/maintenance due to the conditions of the properties
- this request, if supported, would have a very minimal impact on the proposed property tax levy increase especially when taking into consideration the need to provide safe and adequate housing to those who live in London units.

b. HDC - Additional Investment in Affordable Housing Development

HDC is requesting that a possible 2016 2 million surplus be used as an additional investment in affordable housing development for 2017. We support this proposal for the following factors:

- many reports note that there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing units in London.

- the September 2015 Child and Youth Network report entitled “Poverty Trends in London” specified the large number of individuals in London who live in poverty, including 11,00 adults classified as working poor. The lack of affordable housing is a key factor in making daily living for those living in poverty extremely difficult. In London, approximately 100 individuals/families are evicted by the Landlord/Tenant Board each week, with the vast majority of these being tenants unable to pay their rent
- the 2016 Mayor’s Poverty Panel Recommendations noted the need to improve the housing situation in London, and by increasing the number of affordable housing units in London a positive step in this area will occur
- as noted in the City Staff’s request, there are one-time limited funds for development of new affordable housing units from both the provincial and federal governments for the years of 2016/2017. As well as the possibility of leveraging additional funding from the CMHC exists in this area. The City of London needs to access these opportunities as it is unclear whether future funding for affordable housing from the higher levels of government will be available.
- as noted in the budget documents supporting this initiative has no impact on an increase of property tax levels

2. Budget Amendment: Permanent Funding - Children under 13/14 Ride LTC for Free

We submit that the Council review/endorse that permanent funding for this item be added to the budget for the following reasons:

- we submit that this request qualifies for a budget amendment due to the following factors:
 - it can fall under the new council direction category for a budget amendment as the Poverty Reduction Strategy that was accepted/endorsed by Council came after the multi-year budget was passed in 2016
- one of the recommendation that the London’s Poverty Reduction Strategy noted as a short term recommendation that could be accomplished was to “allow children under 12 to ride public transit for free. The rationale for this recommendation outlined by the Advisory Panel was as follows:

Families living with low-income face additional transit costs for children. Allowing children under 12 to ride free helps more families that use public transit get to where they need to go. This strategy is deliberately universal; public transit should not be a stigmatized method of transportation, and a vibrant, well-used transit system is an important part of building a healthy and inclusive community.”
- another recommendation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to “introduce discounted bus pass for youth (13 to 18 years)”
- a very recent staff report to the Community and Protective Services Committee reviewed the issues of allowing children 12/13 riding the LTC for free. The annual cost to the LTC for children 12 and under was estimated at \$136,594 to \$150,254 and for all children under 13/14 would be the range of \$514,369 to \$565,830. The report to CPSC stated, **“There is currently no funding included in the 2016-2019 Multi-Year Budget for this program. As this will be an ongoing annual cost, an ongoing permanent funding source would be appropriate (such as the property tax levy).”**
- the London Community Advocates Network recommends the following and the rationale for these recommendations

- elementary school children (ages 13/14 and under) should ride the LTC for free. We submit it would be easier to administer ages 13/14 and under than 12 and under. ID would be required with the assistance of school boards.
- the appropriate vehicle to fund this program is by the property tax levy. Accepting this new permanent budget expenditure would have a minuscule impact on the property tax levy. Funding this recommendation by increasing LTC fares would not be appropriate as it is submitted that the majority who ride the LTC are of low income. By increasing fares to cover the recommendation that children under 13/14 ride free, would positively impact one group of low income Londoners at the expense of another group of low income Londoners and we submit that is not in line with the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- to meet the recommendations of the Poverty Reduction Strategy funding from all 3 levels of government is needed, including municipal
- by endorsing and implementing this recommendation by making a permanent budget amended to allow children under 13/14 [in the alternative children under 12] to ride LTC for free will show to the community that the Poverty Reduction Strategy is a priority issue and being taken seriously by City Council.

Yours truly,

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