

February 26, 2010

Hon. Laurel Broten  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
56 Wellesley Street West  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

Hon. Dwight Duncan  
Minister of Finance  
Frost Building South  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1Y7

Dear Ministers:

Children's Aid Societies (CASs) cannot keep operating and protecting vulnerable children in this province without adequate funds to meet their statutory mandate.

This is a simple truth that has been repeated time and time again by all of the stakeholders in the system, including the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, and the unions representing staff at CASs.

The one-time funding of \$27 million announced on Feb. 15 has not eased the financial crisis faced by CASs. If anything, it has deepened the anxieties faced by agency staff and voluntary boards.

The amount is less than half of what was needed and 11 agencies facing deficits received zero funds. At least two of the 11, Huron-Perth CAS and CAS of Northumberland, have said they won't be able to make payroll as soon as Mar.12.

Layoffs have only been avoided at agencies such as CAS of Ottawa because experienced staff volunteered to exit the agency, thereby creating openings for staff due to be laid off.

The emergency funding is not sufficient to recall 18 staff members that were laid off at York Region CAS in January.

Services to children are being cut and agencies are managing their deficits by delaying the expense payments and, potentially wages, owed to staff.

Agencies are spending too much of their time managing deficits at a time when demand for child protection services is growing because of the increased stress experienced by families due to the recession.

I would like to share with you the circumstances at London and Middlesex CAS. The Board met Feb. 24 with two staff members of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS).

The agency will have a cash shortfall of \$2.5 million as of Mar. 31. It will receive \$1.1 million in emergency funding. However \$260,800 will be held back until the agency submits a balanced budget. This will be an impossible task since the agency didn't receive the funds necessary to cover this year's deficit.

London and Middlesex CAS will require an advance of \$1.3 million on its 2010-11 funding from the government in order to make payroll on Apr. 2. Even though the fiscal year starts Apr. 1, MCYS staff told the agency's Board that due to the Easter holiday weekend, the Ministry may not be able to provide the funds until Apr. 6.

CAS staff provide services legally mandated by your government. Are you honestly telling them they have to wait five days for monies legally owed to them because the funds can't be flowed on Mar. 31 or Apr. 1 to their employer?

Staff have also been informed by the agency that they will not be reimbursed for mileage and other expenses generated in February and March until mid-April, leaving staff out of pocket for considerable sums of money. A number of staff work in Middlesex County and others drive throughout southwestern Ontario in order to visit with children on a regular, required basis.

CAS Boards throughout the province are meeting to determine whether to apply for lines of credit for services that are mandated by the government and should be, therefore, properly funded. The London CAS has had its application for a line of credit turned down, despite a letter from MCYS supporting the agency's application.

If voluntary boards don't want to pay for government services by applying for credit lines, or if they have exhausted their credit lines, MCYS staff are telling them to deal with their deficits by fund-raising!

Agencies have cut the following services to children because they lack the funds to pay for them:

- Transportation costs, including volunteer drivers, for children to attend therapy, access visits with parents and siblings, and other programs;
- Drug-screening to see if parents are still using drugs;
- Recreation budgets, limiting the access foster children have to sports programs;
- The production of "life" books for children in foster care; through photographs and anecdotes, these books tell the story of a child with a foster family, thus helping a child gain an important sense of self and of being loved and cared for.

I am very troubled by suggestions in your government's messaging that the financial crisis is caused, in part, by agencies providing services that are not mandated by law.

This is simply not true. As you know, CASs have the exclusive mandate to protect children from abuse and neglect in Ontario. While the best known of their functions is the investigation of allegations of abuse and the placement of children into care, agencies are mandated by the *Children and Family Services Act* (CFSA) to do far more.

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CASs provide a broad range of protection services that support children and families in order to prevent circumstances that might require intervention by the agency. CAS staff work with biological families to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect, teaching parenting skills, providing counseling, and other support to families.

These vital, mandated functions, outlined in Section 9 of the CFSA, keep children out of care and in family-based settings which all the available research concludes provides the best outcomes for children.

The fact is that your government's funding model *does not* fund these important agency functions required by your law.

With due respect, it is time your government provided sustainable, annualized funding so desperately needed by Ontario's Children Aid Societies. To do otherwise, represents a serious abrogation of your responsibilities to the children of this province

Sincerely,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas  
President

WS/mp

cc: Rick Pybus, OPSEU Chair, Children's Aid Societies  
Marnie Dickout, president, Local 116, CAS of London and Middlesex  
Tracy More, OPSEU Negotiator