Waterloo Region
Community Legal Services

Kitchener – Main Office
450 Frederick Street, Unit 101
Kitchener, Ontario N2K 2P5

Phone: 519-743-0254
Fax: 519-743-1588

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONTARIO WORKS RATES STUCK IN TIME

This July, some social assistance rates went up 1.9% based on inflation, but they are not going up for everyone on social assistance. Ontario Works rates remain frozen for the eighth year, with no adjustment for inflation. The last time Ontario Works benefits were increased was 2018, but a lot has changed since then. During that period, we've seen a 205% increase in people in the Region of Waterloo accessing food banks and a 612% increase in people experiencing homelessness.

For single adults, the Ontario Works rate is frozen at $733 per month. Because there has been no inflation-related increase in years, in real terms, in 2026, Ontario Works rates for a single person have actually *decreased* by nearly $140 per month, or over $1,700 per year. This is money effectively taken from the poorest Ontarians through inaction, while prices skyrocket.

Let's cut through the noise and remember who is actually on OW: single parents, young people who can't find adequate work, and people who are full-time unpaid caregivers to their elderly or disabled loved ones. Many people on OW want to work but their circumstances prevent it, or they are working but not getting enough hours to cover their bills. It doesn't help that once recipients find employment and start working, their social assistance cheques are clawed back after only about a dozen hours of work. These low rates and income reduction rules are destabilizing, making it impossible for OW recipients to get on solid ground.

Keeping people on social assistance in dire poverty has not worked. It's time to try something new to help Ontarians get into and stay in the workforce. If the government doesn't want to increase rates, they must at least account for how much inflation has chipped away at the real value of a dollar since 2018. Indexing Ontario Works to inflation and allowing recipients to keep more of their social assistance income would be two huge steps that would help the poorest members of our communities immediately. Treating OW recipients like it's still 2018 helps no one; this government needs to leave the past behind and get up to speed with the economic realities of today.

For further information regarding this media release, please contact Joel Yinger, Director of Legal Services, at 519-743-0254, ext. 14.