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Archived - September 2016 Mandate letter: Housing and Poverty Reduction Strategy

Premier's instructions to the Minister on priorities.



September 23, 2016

The Honourable Chris Ballard
Minister of Housing
Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
777 Bay Street, 17th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Ballard:

Welcome to your roles as Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. As we mark the mid-point of our mandate, we have a strong and new Cabinet, and are poised to redouble our efforts to deliver on our top priority — creating jobs and growth. Guided by our balanced plan to build Ontario up for everyone, we will continue to work together to deliver real benefits and more inclusive growth that will help people in their everyday lives.

We embark on this important part of our mandate knowing that our four-part economic plan is working — we are making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history, making postsecondary education more affordable and accessible, leading the transition to a low-carbon economy and the fight against climate change, and building retirement security for workers.

Building on our ambitious and activist agenda, and with a focus on implementing our economic plan, we will continue to forge partnerships with businesses, educators, labour, communities, the not-for-profit sector and with all Ontarians to foster economic growth and to make a genuine, positive difference in people's lives. Collaboration and active listening remain at the heart of the work we undertake on behalf of the people of Ontario — these are values that ensure a common purpose, stimulate positive change and help achieve desired outcomes. With this in mind, I ask that you work closely with your Cabinet colleagues to deliver positive results on initiatives that cut across several ministries, such as our Climate Change Action Plan, Business Growth Initiative, and the Highly Skilled Workforce Strategy. I also ask you to collaborate with the Minister Responsible for Digital Government to drive digital transformation across government and modernize public service delivery.

We have made tangible progress and have achieved the following key results:

Led the Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- As part of our commitment to break the cycle of poverty for children and youth, we increased the Ontario Child Benefit and indexed it to the Consumer Price Index so that it will keep pace with future increases in the cost of living.
- Continued to make strategic investments in health, education and housing for the most vulnerable in society through Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Launched the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, \$50 million investment over six years to support innovative and sustainable community-driven initiatives that measurably improve the lives of those most affected by poverty.
- We have also increased the minimum wage and indexed it to the CPI. From October 1, 2016, we will raise the minimum wage further to \$11.40 — keeping Ontario's wage the highest of any province in Canada.

Moved Forward on Social and Affordable Housing:

- Together with the federal government, we renewed the Investment in Affordable Housing Program for another five years. More than \$800 million is available for this initiative. In the past year alone, the program supported the creation of 700 new affordable rental housing units, repairs to nearly 1,700 affordable housing units, as well as rental and down payment assistance to over 2,500 families and individuals across Ontario.
- Our government established the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness to obtain advice on how to meet our long-term goal of ending chronic homelessness. The panel's report and recommendations on how to define and measure homelessness was released in fall 2015.
- Informed by the panel's report, we updated the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) to continue the transformation of Ontario's housing and homelessness system. In the 2016 Budget, we announced an investment of \$178 million over three years to provide housing subsidies and benefits to additional households, including support for the construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units over the long term. This funding will help accelerate the goal to end chronic homelessness by 2025.
- Introduced the *Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016*, which would help ensure that the people of Ontario will have better access to affordable and adequate housing. Among other initiatives, it would, if passed, provide a framework to allow municipalities to enact inclusionary zoning bylaws.

Your mandate is to work collaboratively with lead and affected ministers, broader public sector partners and stakeholders across the province to:

Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Oversee the Implementation of Realizing our Potential: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy

- Working with your minister colleagues, as well as our community, businesses and not-for-profit partners, focus on:
 - Continuing to break the cycle of poverty for children and youth.
 - Enabling persons to move toward employment and income security.
 - Working toward the goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025 as part of the longer term goal of ending homelessness in Ontario.
 - Using evidence-based social policy and measuring success.
 - Continuing to call on the federal government to work collaboratively with Ontario to develop and implement solutions that meet the needs of Ontarians.

New Approaches to Provide Consistent and Predictable Support for Vulnerable Ontarians

- Work in partnership with the Minister of Community and Social Services to design and introduce a Basic Income Pilot, building on the advice of the Special Advisor and broader public consultation, by the end of April 2017.
- Develop a food security strategy that addresses physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, including in remote First Nations communities. To achieve this, you will work with the ministers of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and Children and Youth Services.

Minister of Housing

Continue the Transformation of Ontario's Housing System Into One that is People-centred, Partnership-based, Responsive to Local Needs and Fiscally Responsible

- Deliver on the commitments made in the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy Update that was released in March 2016, which includes:
 - Support passage of the *Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016*.
 - Introduce a framework for a portable housing benefit to give people more flexibility and choice and conduct a pilot program to test an alternative means of meeting the needs of survivors of domestic violence.
 - Develop a policy framework to bring greater coherence to the supportive housing system, working with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the Minister of Community and Social Services.
- And in 2017:
 - Consult on and develop simplified rent-geared-to-income calculations to reduce paperwork for tenants and housing providers.
 - Develop a modernized framework for social housing aligned with the government's focus on poverty reduction.
 - Develop an Indigenous Housing Strategy, with the support of the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, to address the unique housing challenges and needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples living off reserve.
 - Propose legislative amendments to encourage small landlords to provide rental housing while ensuring tenants have appropriate protections.
- Work with the Ministry of Infrastructure/Community Hubs Secretariat, and representatives of the private and not-for-profit sector to develop a Partnership Table on innovative, flexible approaches to encourage new affordable housing throughout the province.
- Work with the Minister of Community and Social Services to ensure that proposals to reform social assistance reflect the government's housing agenda.

Engage with the Federal Government to Promote Ontario's Housing Interests

- Work with the federal government and other provincial and territorial partners on the development of a National Housing Strategy, with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.
- Continue to work in partnership with the Ministers of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Intergovernmental Affairs, the federal government and indigenous partners to recognize the important relationship between housing conditions on-reserve and the need for housing and homelessness services off-reserve.

Support the Climate Change Action Plan

- Support the implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan by proposing measures by spring 2017 to limit the impact of carbon-costs on tenants and work with other ministries to provide support for energy retrofits of large multi-unit residential and social housing buildings.

In addition to the priority activities above, I ask that you also deliver results for Ontarians by driving progress in the following areas:

- Work collaboratively with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Finance and the federal government to explore various measures relating to housing affordability.
- Work collaboratively with the Minister of Municipal Affairs on changes to the Building Code, which would reduce the cost of constructing secondary suites.
- Prepare and release annual reports detailing our government's progress on the targets and indicators in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and highlighting cross-government poverty reduction initiatives.
- Continue to support local initiatives in poverty reduction by administering the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, including dedicated funds for Indigenous communities and for homelessness initiatives.

As you know, taking action on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report is a priority for our government. That is why we released *The Journey Together*, a document that serves as a blueprint for making our government's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality. As we move forward with the implementation of the report, I ask you and your fellow Cabinet members to work together, in co-operation with our Indigenous partners, to help achieve real and measurable change for Indigenous communities.

Having made significant progress over the past year in implementing our community hubs strategy, I encourage you and your Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the Premier's Special Advisor on Community Hubs and the Community Hubs Secretariat, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, are given the support they need to continue their vital cross-government work aimed at making better use of public properties, encouraging multi-use spaces and helping communities create financially sustainable hub models.

Responsible fiscal management remains an overarching priority for our government — a priority echoed strongly in our 2016 Budget. Thanks to our disciplined approach to the province's finances over the past two years, we are on track to balance the budget next year, in 2017–18, which will also lower the province's debt-to-GDP ratio. Yet this is not the moment to rest on our past accomplishments: it is essential that we work collaboratively across every sector of government to support evidence-based decision-making to ensure programs and services are effective, efficient and sustainable, in order to balance the budget by 2017–18, maintain balance in 2018–19, and position the province for longer-term fiscal sustainability.

Marathon runners will tell you that an event's halfway mark is an opportunity to reflect on progress made — but they will also tell you that it is the ideal moment to concentrate more intently and to move decisively forward. At this halfway mark of this government's mandate, I encourage you to build on the momentum that we have successfully achieved over the past two years, to work in tandem with your fellow ministers to advance our economic plan and to ensure that Ontario remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

I look forward to working together with you to build opportunity and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Wynne
Premier

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