

25 in 5: Network for
Poverty Reduction 

c/o Mennonite Central Committee Ontario
50 Kent Ave.
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

March 1, 2010

The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, MPP
Minister of Community and Social Services
6th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Meilleur,

On behalf of the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction, I am writing to express our very strong concern about a recent memo circulated by the directors of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program about the Special Diet Allowance Program.

As you know, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario recently determined that the way the Special Diet Allowance Program is administered discriminates against the three complainants whose cases were brought forward. The directors' memo, dated February 25, highlights but does not deny a rumour that your government is considering eliminating the Special Diet Allowance Program in response.

The Tribunal's decision confirms the importance of this program to the special nutritional needs of the many Ontarians it serves. The 25 in 5 Network wants to express, in the strongest possible terms, that the Special Diet Allowance Program must be maintained and strengthened. There must be no consideration of elimination of the program. Eliminating the program will not only lead to extreme hardship for many Ontarians who depend upon it for their special nutritional needs, but would also be seen as extraordinarily premature in light of the work of the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council and the upcoming Social Assistance Review, as promised in the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

No cuts should be made to Ontario's social assistance system in Budget 2010, and no major changes should be made to these programs until you and your government have had an opportunity to review the system as a whole. Major changes, such as the elimination of the Special Diet Allowance program, would certainly be seen as pre-emptive of such a review, which low-income Ontarians and their families have now been anticipating for more than a year.

Sincerely,



Mike Creek
Co-Chair, 25 in 5 Network



Greg deGroot-Maggetti
Co-Chair, 25 in 5 Network

CC: The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Children and Youth Services