



**GEORGINA**

## External Briefing Note

**Subject:** Draft Resolution – Increase Social Assistance Support Rates

**To:** Mayor and Council

**From:** Shawn Nastke, Director of Strategic Initiatives

**Date:** May 29, 2024

**Briefing:** Support for Review of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Financial Assistance Rates

### Background

On March 27, 2024, Council received notice that Prince Edward County and the Town of Grimsby, following in the footsteps of several municipalities across Ontario (including Orangeville, Orillia, and Goderich), had adopted resolutions that called on the Province to increase both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates to a level that more reasonably correlates to the cost of living. (These calls came in the wake of the Raise the Rates campaign, supported by advocacy groups such as the Income Security Advocacy Centre.)

A single person relying on OW receives a maximum of \$733 a month in funding – a rate that has not changed since 2018. This amount is supposed to cover basic needs and shelter.

ODSP recipients, meanwhile, receive a maximum of \$1,308 a month, adjusted to their specific situation. The Province made the decision to add inflationary increases to this figure every July, starting in 2023.

The Province wholly manages ODSP, from administration to program delivery. The funding model for OW, however, requires the provincial government and municipalities to work together to cover its costs. One of York Region's responsibilities as an upper-tier municipality is to manage the delivery of OW as the System Administrator. The costs related to program delivery are shared between York Region and the Province. This funding has not increased since 2018, though the overall number of OW cases has ballooned by 41% across the Region.

In this year's budget submission to the province, York Region called for the Province to increase and index OW rates with inflation, as well as increase administration funding to manage its growing caseload. In 2023, there were 1,054 OW cases in Georgina, some of which would include couples and families. This caseload in Georgina has remained relatively stable since 2018.

The World Health Organization has noted that determinants such as income and housing have a direct impact on shaping daily life and health outcomes (2024). As such, individuals seeking social supports such as OW and ODSP are disproportionately vulnerable.

Given the fact that Town of Georgina staff were tasked at the March 5, 2024 Special Meeting on Affordable Housing and Homelessness to develop partnerships and advance initiatives to address issues around homelessness and affordable housing within Georgina – and that those seeking social supports like OW and ODSP are most at risk of housing insecurity/homelessness -- Council at its March 27, 2024 meeting directed staff to consult with York Region on this matter. In conversations with York Region staff, the following resolution was drafted, which encourages the Ontario government to increase social support rates to something more in line with the current cost of living, while also indexing both programs to inflation:

**Council Resolution – Request to Increase Social Assistance Support Rates**

WHEREAS all families and individuals in the province of Ontario are grappling with a higher cost of living, with the costs of basic needs like food and housing outpacing inflation; and

WHEREAS the most vulnerable amongst us – those reliant on social assistance incomes, such as Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) – are impacted even more by the current economic climate; and

WHEREAS Ontario Works rates have been unchanged since 2018, sitting at a maximum of \$733 per month for a single person; and

WHEREAS in 2023, there were 1,054 Ontario Works cases in Georgina; and

WHEREAS York Region has urged the Province to update Ontario Works and ODSP shelter allowances to take into account local housing market realities so that recipients can afford safe, stable housing; and

WHEREAS it has been acknowledged by the provincial government that adjustments should be made for inflation when it comes to ODSP (the first ODSP adjustment last year added about \$80 to a single recipient's basic payment, bringing it to \$1,308 per month) – an adjustment that York Region has been urging the government to replicate with Ontario Works since 2023; and

WHEREAS both Ontario Works and ODSP support is inadequate to manage against the inflationary increases to the cost of living

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

A. THAT the Town of Georgina calls on the Government of Ontario to act urgently to raise the social assistance rates to an acceptable level that correlates with the cost of living;

B. THAT the Government of Ontario ensures social assistance supports keep pace with the rate of inflation by adjusting Ontario Works each year, as has been done with ODSP; and

C. THAT the Province, as was requested by York Region, increase program delivery funding to manage York Region's ballooning caseload; and

D. THAT the Clerk BE DIRECTED to forward a copy of this resolution to the Honourable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Honourable Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health, the Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), York Region Chairman Wayne Emmerson, The Regional Municipality of York and its lower-tier municipalities, Prince Edward County and the Town of Grimsby.