

New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc.

News release

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Kelly Lamrock is attacking New Brunswickers on certified disability with his changes in delivering their yearly supplement

"Once again, this government is attacking one of our most vulnerable citizens. People with disabilities and depending on social assistance are in the category receiving the lowest basic income in all of Canada" says Linda McCaustlin, co-chair of the Common Front for Social Justice.

To help them out, the provincial government had a program which gave them a yearly supplement of \$1000. Minister Lamrock wants to change this. He wants to divide this amount in twelve and include it in their monthly cheques.

"We are totally opposed to this change for the following reasons" continues Ms McCaustlin:

- We consider that the annual \$1000 supplement mailing approach was working well so we don't understand why there is a need to change it
- The inclusion of a one-twelfth additional amount (\$83.33) in the regular monthly cheque could very well provoke a rent increase for those that are in subsidized housing. In the past, each time, there was an increase in social assistance cheques, there was an increase in the rent. This would result in a loss of revenue. Those in subsidized housing are paying 30% of their revenue. If the Minister's change happened, these people would lose one third of their supplement (\$300 from the \$1000).
- A number of people receiving this \$1000-supplement are using it to pay off accumulated debts, to purchase basic necessities (such as a wheel chair), etc.
- The sudden decision to change the method of delivery of the supplement goes against the philosophy of the N.B. Poverty Reduction Plan which professed to be as helpful as possible toward people living on limited means such as those with disabilities. These are vulnerable citizens and moreover, they are receiving the lowest total income in their category throughout Canada.

In 2007, New Brunswickers with disabilities received a basic social assistance annual rate of \$7,038 plus an additional yearly \$1,000 in social assistance benefits as well as a \$237 Federal GST Credit. This gave them a total annual income of \$8,275. In the Atlantic region in 2007, the same category of people in Newfoundland and Labrador were receiving \$10,878, in PEI, \$8,623, and in NS \$9,088. In 2007, disabled New Brunswickers, with an annual income of only \$8,275, when compared to the before-tax Low Income Cut-off from Statistics Canada which was \$18,659, they only reached 44% of the poverty line. There has been very little changes in these rates since then.

"This government has praised the N.B. Poverty Reduction Plan as a model for the rest of Canada. But when it comes to real world realities such as helping people living in poverty, they are putting them down. We just have to remember that it is this same government which reneged on its last electoral promise of increasing the basic social assistance rates to the Atlantic average. In the last couple of years, they also failed to give a 2% increase in social assistance rates to offset the rate of inflation.

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The Common Front for Social Justice is one of the largest democratic and popular organizations in New Brunswick, with close to 75,000 group and individual members. The Common Front brings together individuals as well as local, regional and provincial organizations to work towards the eradication of poverty.