

May 14, 2025

Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor
438 University Ave., Toronto

Re: Tackling Child and Youth Poverty in Ontario

Dear Minister Parsa,

On behalf of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), I write to express our deep concern about the growing rates of child and youth poverty in Ontario—and to urge the Government of Ontario to take bold, coordinated action in the renewal of the province's poverty reduction strategy.

We represent public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. Together, our members serve the educational needs of nearly 1.4 million students – almost 70% of Ontario's elementary and secondary students – in public schools. OPSBA advocates for high-quality education, equity, and a strong, well-supported public education system that is the foundation of a prosperous, democratic, and inclusive society.

Earlier this year, at a meeting of our Education Program Work Group, we heard from Family Services Toronto regarding their Campaign 2000 initiative. Their 2024 report, [*Tackling Child Poverty: A Call for Bold Solutions*](#), paints an alarming picture: nearly one in five children in Ontario now lives in poverty. That's more than 550,000 kids. More troubling still, the report confirms that poverty rates have risen above pre-pandemic levels, with Ontario experiencing the largest recorded increase in child poverty among Canadian provinces.

Indigenous and racialized communities, as well as those with disabilities, are disproportionately affected, creating long-term inequities that will have lasting impacts on health, education, and economic outcomes. The report also identifies food insecurity as a direct reflection of poverty – a reality increasingly observed in schools across the province. School boards have long championed the need for a universal, stigma-free, and sustainable school food program, as this directly supports our mandate to promote student achievement and well-being and were pleased to see the agreement between the federal and provincial governments announced in November 2024. With many Ontario families facing rising costs of living, this program will have a tremendous impact on school communities and family budgets alike.

However, the data presented in the Campaign 2000 report – and echoed in the Auditor General of Ontario's recent audit of Child and Youth Mental Health Services – clearly demonstrate the need for urgent, systemic action. As the province prepares to renew its Poverty Reduction Strategy beyond 2025, we urge you to make children and youth a clear and specific priority.

OPSBA strongly supports several of the recommendations outlined in the Campaign 2000 report and the Auditor General's findings.

In particular, we call for:

- **a fully funded, needs-based mental health system** for children and youth, with targeted investments for those with complex needs.
- **reduced wait times** for mental health and wellness services, including culturally specific programs for Indigenous, racialized, and other marginalized children and youth.
- **sustainable and equitable funding for education**, ensuring schools can meet the mental health, wellness, and learning needs of all students.
- **a comprehensive strategy to address service accessibility**, in line with the Auditor General's recommendation, including modernized funding models and workforce planning.
- **improved transitions from youth to adult mental health services**, so that no young person is left without critical support during a pivotal life stage.

OPSBA is committed to working in partnership with government and community organizations to support the mental health and well-being of Ontario students. Our collaborative work with the Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health, including the development of resources for parents and caregivers, reflects this ongoing commitment.

We believe the upcoming renewal of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy offers a critical opportunity to address the root causes of inequity and build a stronger, healthier future for all children and youth. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your representatives to further discuss how OPSBA and our member boards can support this important work.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Kathleen Woodcock', is positioned above the printed name.

Kathleen Woodcock
President

CC: Minister of Education Paul Calandra
Madison Lee, Director of Stakeholder Relations and Tour, Minister's Officer (Education)