



October 3, 2011

Ms. Barbara McCormack
President
Family Alliance Ontario
c/o Durham Family Network
20-850 King Street West
Oshawa, Ontario
L1J 8N5

Dear Ms. McCormack:

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Family Alliance Ontario. I appreciate the opportunity to address the important issues you raised.

Since 2003, Ontario Liberals have worked hard to improve the services and supports available to people with disabilities and their families, both through improvements in accessibility and the transformation of the developmental services sector. We have invested more than half a billion dollars in new ongoing funding for developmental services since we took office — a 54 per cent increase. We have also passed, and are currently implementing, the *Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, 2008*, which along with innovative programs like our Passport Initiative, is making major improvements to Ontario's system.

Starting this past July, individuals and their families can apply for services and supports at one place — Development Services Ontario (DSO). DSO provides information, confirms eligibility, determines needs for services and supports, and will administer direct funding agreements in the future.

As we continue to transform the developmental services sector, we know there are immediate needs for additional services and supports across the province. That is why this year's Budget included an additional \$40 million for developmental services, including \$4 million in new funding for the Special Services at Home (SSAH) program —

.../2

which allows us to serve almost 1,000 more people and will help reduce the wait list by more than 25 per cent this year. We are investing \$103 million in the SSAH program this year, providing more than 25,000 people access to respite and in-home services.

Ontario Liberals appreciate the dedication and commitment of parents who are caring for children and adults with disabilities at home. We have made changes to the SSAH program to give families the flexibility they need to access and pay for supports at home and in the community, including allowing primary caregivers to compensate other family members to provide respite.

In addition, passport programs received an additional \$11 million this year, allowing us to serve almost 1,000 more people and will reduce the wait list by over 20 per cent. Since Ontario Liberals introduced this program in 2005, we have invested almost \$45 million annually.

Compared with the PCs — who cut funding for developmental services and agencies when they were in office — Ontario Liberals have been, and continue to be, committed to improving access to services for the developmentally disabled.

Ontario Liberals have sought to improve opportunities and the well-being of social assistance recipients. One of the PCs' first acts in government was to cut Ontario Works by 22 per cent and freeze Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates. Ontario Liberals have removed punitive rules and increased supports to help recipients move toward independence and self-sufficiency.

We believe our programs can and should do more to eliminate barriers for people working to improve their lives. Changes we have already made to ODSP to support this include: simplified rules around earnings exemptions, so the more people work, the more money people keep; exemptions like home and student loans, registered disability savings plans (RDSPs) and registered education savings plans (RESPs) as assets; created employment benefits to help people who are working pay for job-related costs; extended drug, dental and vision care benefits for people leaving social assistance for employment; and increased the amount that ODSP recipients can receive as a gift or payment.

Since taking office in 2003, we have increased social assistance rates seven times and will have provided an additional \$1.8 billion in rate increases to recipients by the end of this year.

However, Ontario Liberals recognize that the task of building a more prosperous and equitable province is far from finished. That is why we have launched the largest Social

Assistance Review in Ontario in over 20 years. Through the review, we are looking at how we can make programs like ODSP more responsive to the people who need help, simpler to understand, more connected to employment opportunities, and work better with other income security programs available to Ontarians. We are looking forward to receiving the final report and recommendations of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario.

Ontario Liberals are committed to working closely with the community, clients and families as we continue to transform the development services sector. As you know, we have been working on developing and improving the quality assurance measures under the new developmental services legislation. This includes looking at how to better meet a person's specific needs and behaviour.

Last year, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities after consultations with provinces and territories, Aboriginal self-governments and Canadians — particularly from the disability community. Ontario participated, and continues to play a critical role, in ensuring that the rights of persons with disabilities are protected and advanced.

Over the past few years, we have also taken some significant steps toward our goal of making Ontario accessible by 2025. In 2005, we introduced the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA). The AODA is helping to create inclusion for everyone in Ontario, regardless of their abilities, so they can reach their full potential. Four of the five accessibility standards are now in place and these lay the foundation to achieve greater accessibility in Ontario — for instance more accessible transportation systems for Ontarians to get to school or work, a more inclusive employment hiring process, tolerant workplaces, more inviting public spaces, and government and business websites that are comprehensive and within reach for people with varying disabilities.

We are starting to see encouraging results from many of the policy initiatives Ontario Liberals have undertaken since 2003. For instance, we have seen a 35 per cent increase in the number of students with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education and a 70 per cent increase in the number of people on ODSP participating in the workforce. A recent study by the Martin Prosperity Institute, estimates that the AODA could increase access to higher education for people with disabilities, resulting in a potential increase up to \$1.5 billion in their employment income.

Ontario Liberals are committed to nurturing a modern, fair and sustainable system to help people with developmental disabilities live more independently and participate more fully in communities. Thank you for your commitment and advocacy. I look

forward to continuing to work together to improve supports and services for those with developmental disabilities and their families.

Ms. McCormack, thank you again for your letter. Please accept my best wishes.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dalton McGuinty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "M".

Dalton McGuinty
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party
Premier