

Our File/N/Réf. 03-07-98-0091
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 29 January 1998

TO/DEST. The Chair and Members of Council

FROM/EXP. A/Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee

SUBJECT/OBJET **CORRESPONDENCE FROM HARMONY HOUSE**

Information Previously Distributed
To Be Listed on Community Services
Committee Agenda 19 Feb 98

Please find attached a copy of a letter from Harmony House, a shelter for women and children, to Councillor A. Munter, expressing concerns about the potential impact of reducing or eliminating Supplementary Aid/Special Assistance.

Approved by
J. Bionda

Attach. (1)

cc: C.A.O's Office
Department Heads
Corporate Resource Centre



HARMONY HOUSE
1005 EGLISE STREET
OTTAWA, ONTARIO K1R 6S3

TEL (613) 233-3386
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Councillor Alex Munter
Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton
Ottawa-Carleton Centre, Cartier Square
111 Lisgar Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K2P 2L7

January 22, 1998

Dear Mr. Munter,

I am writing to you to express Harmony House's grave concerns regarding the future of the Supplementary Aid/Special Assistance program. Harmony House is a second stage shelter for women and their children who are fleeing violence. As such Harmony House provides safe, longer term shelter at rents geared to income, and a variety of supports that women and children need as they re-establish lives free of violence.

In the past two years we have seen so many funding cuts that have dramatically impacted on abused women's lives. I am sure you have heard over and over how social assistance reductions have made it extremely difficult for women to survive and support their families. Cutbacks to other tools abused women use to leave, such as legal aid, and community programs have compounded the situation.

I'd like to offer you an illustration of how any further reductions, and specifically reductions to special assistance may impact on women's and children's lives. As it stands now, cutbacks to legal aid have made it virtually impossible for women to regain assets of their relationships. As a result, those women who can, take as many of their assets as they can when they leave. This requires moving costs. If a woman moves her furniture into storage while she stays at an emergency shelter, she will again require moving costs once she finds affordable housing in the community. Normally, women are only allowed these costs once per year. However, often we can obtain them through special assistance. If this option were eliminated, women would more often than not be forced to leave their belongings behind, leaving them more destitute. Additionally, women often have to obtain some items required to set up their new households through special assistance or community start up. If this were eliminated, women would be left to furnish their new homes on welfare cheques that currently barely feed their families, clearly a no win situation.

Other specific uses of special assistance for abused women are situations in which women have financial arrears caused by their abusive partners. We have been able to have rent arrears, or arrears for certain bills cleared through special assistance so that women are able to set up their

new homes. If this were eliminated, once again women would find themselves with a virtually insurmountable barrier to escaping their violent homes and establishing their lives free of their abusive partners.

For abused women with disabilities, or who have children with disabilities, cuts to assistive devices would have enormous impacts. There is simply no way these women could afford them through their regular cheques.

The cuts that have already taken place have left women unable to meet their ongoing needs. If dental care for their children, back to school costs, start up costs for beds and cribs etc. were also eliminated, the impacts would be devastating.

These are just some examples of situations that we would undoubtedly see if special assistance were reduced, or worse yet, eliminated. I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep me informed if and when this issue comes to Council. Harmony House staff and board members, as well as current and former residents would be greatly interested in attending debates and votes held regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leighann Burns-Campagna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Leighann Burns-Campagna
Executive Director

cc Regional Council