



Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**For Immediate Release**

**Date: September 18, 2012**

**Cut to Provincial Housing Benefits Will Hurt Local Communities**

Local housing advocates are asking the provincial government to reconsider its decision to cut the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) and the Home Repairs Benefit (HRB) effective January 1, 2013. The CSUMB is a benefit that is available to recipients of Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability (ODSP) benefits once every two years to help cover the cost of major expenses such as last month's rent deposits, rent and hydro arrears, hook-up fees for utilities, and emergency furniture replacements. The HRB was available to homeowners on OW or ODSP to cover the cost of necessary repairs to their homes. Because monthly social assistance rates are low, recipients cannot afford to pay for such expenses with their monthly income. If the cut goes ahead, the HRB will be lost completely and only 50% of former CSUMB monies will be given to municipalities across Ontario to fund homelessness prevention programs.

The reduction in benefits will have a devastating impact on people in our community, as less money will be available to help people meet emergency housing needs. Staff at the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre, which provides legal advice to tenants in Hastings, Prince Edward, and Lennox & Addington counties, fear that the cut to CSUMB will lead to increased homelessness locally. Often, where a tenant has fallen into rent arrears due to job loss or other unforeseen circumstances, eviction can be prevented by accessing CSUMB monies.

The CSUMB is also used by women and families trying to move from transitional shelters into permanent homes after experiencing domestic violence; people who cannot afford the rising cost of utilities; people with disabilities who are trying to move from hospital into the community; and people who need to move for reasons such as a change in family size or maintenance problems.

While the provincial government aims to save money by cutting CSUMB and HRB, the loss of benefits will prevent people from accessing money that is needed to prevent evictions, establish permanent homes, and keep the heat on during the winter.

The upcoming cut will also place serious pressure on local municipalities. Starting January 1, municipalities will be given the responsibility to administer emergency housing funds for a larger pool of individuals, but with substantially less money. For example, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington Counties face a funding shortfall of \$416,000 for 2013 as a result of the provincial cut. According to Prince Edward County Mayor Peter Mertens, "This shortfall will seriously impact on our municipalities' ability to deliver badly needed assistance without

further support from the taxpayer. Our existing budget will not be able to cope with the size of this reduction in funding.”

It is not too late for citizens to express their opinions on this issue by contacting government ministers or MPPs. **The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre will be hosting a “Call-in Coffee Break” at its Belleville office (158 George Street, Level 1) on September 28, 2012, from 9 am – 12 pm for people who want to learn more about the upcoming cut and contact their MPP’s office to voice concerns about the issue. All are welcome to attend.**

CALC is a community legal clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario. Clinic staff cannot give legal information or advice in criminal, family or real estate matters. The clinic was founded in 1980 and serves low income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward and Lennox & Addington counties. The clinic’s main office is in Belleville, with satellite locations in Amherstview, Trenton, Picton, Napanee, Bancroft and Madoc.

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For further information about the contents of this press release, please call Deirdre McDade at 613-966-8686, ext 26 or Toll Free at 1-877-966-8686, ext 26.

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