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## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

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**For Immediate Release**

**Date: April 8, 2020**

### **More than 130 Community Organizations Call on Ontario to Cancel Clawbacks and Increase Supports for Vulnerable People During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Open Letter and Virtual Press Conference**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused sickness, loss of life, tremendous anxiety, and immense economic disruption. Deirdre McDade, Co-Director of Legal Services, at the Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC) notes that “it has undermined the income security of many Ontarians.” She observed that while federal and provincial governments have taken positive steps to provide additional income support, low-income Ontarians are falling through the cracks. They are facing rising economic pressure from unexpected expenses, increasing food costs, having children at home with lack of access to school and community food programs, and lack of transportation to grocery stores and food banks.

In an [open letter](#) to the Minister of Children, Community, and Social Services, a broad coalition of more than 130 organizations including CALC, the local Poverty Roundtable, food banks, health providers, faith groups, other legal clinics, low-income Ontarians, and community groups from across the province have called for two immediate changes to Ontario’s social assistance programs. These changes would help low-income Ontarians to make ends meet during this emergency.

First, the letter calls for social assistance rates to be immediately increased. “Ontario’s social assistance rates are far below the poverty line. It is nearly impossible to survive on them at the best of times, let alone during a pandemic with extra expenses and rising costs everywhere,” said McDade. Raising the rates would also mean more people will qualify for social assistance. “This would be life-saving for many low-income Ontarians who currently do not qualify for any provincial or federal benefits but who have been knocked out by the current crisis,” said McDade.

Second, the letter calls for Ontario to not claw back federal benefits from social assistance recipients. McDade noted that “Currently, any income received from Employment Insurance (EI) or the newly announced Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) will be deducted dollar-for-dollar from social assistance benefits. The new federal benefits are meant for individuals and families affected by the current emergency. We need to ensure that any money they receive stays in their pockets.” Similar changes have already [been made](#) in BC,

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

Community Advocacy & Legal Centre  
158 George Street  
Belleville, ON K8N 3H2  
[www.communitylegalcentre.ca](http://www.communitylegalcentre.ca)

where CERB and EI payments are exempted and social assistance payments have been increased. "There is no reason Ontario cannot do the same for our residents," states McDade.

A virtual press conference is being held on April 8, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. with speakers from the Income Security Advocacy Centre, Health Providers Against Poverty, Daily Bread Food Bank, ODSP Action Coalition, and Clinique juridique francophone d'Ottawa. **Locally, Co-Director of Legal Services Deirdre McDade is available to speak to the media for further clarification of the issues, if desired.**

**Media contacts:**

Deirdre McDade, Co-Director of Legal Services, by phone or email at 613-966-8686 x26 or [mcdaded@lao.on.ca](mailto:mcdaded@lao.on.ca) OR Lisa Turik, CALC Lawyer, by email at [turikl@lao.on.ca](mailto:turikl@lao.on.ca).

CALC provides access to justice through quality legal services, advocacy, and information for people living on a low income or in poverty, while promoting legal empowerment and collaborating with community partners.

The Community Advocacy & Legal Centre (CALC) is a non-profit community legal clinic principally funded by Legal Aid Ontario. The clinic was founded in 1980 and provides poverty law services to low income residents of Hastings, Prince Edward, Lennox & Addington counties and Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. The clinic's main office is in Belleville, with satellite locations in Amherstview, Bancroft, Madoc, Marmora, Napanee, Picton, Trenton, Tweed and Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. For more information, visit CALC's website at [www.communitylegalcentre.ca](http://www.communitylegalcentre.ca).

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