

**THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF ONTARIO
LE CONSEIL DES FEMMES DE LA PROVINCE D'ONTARIO**

**ANNUAL BRIEF
FOR PRESENTATION TO
THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO
TO THE PREMIER**

2004

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**The Hon. James K. Bartleman
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario**

**Presented to Cabinet
November 2004**

THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO 2004

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BRIEF TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO – 2004

PROFILE OF COUNCIL

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO) was founded in 1923 as an affiliate of the National Council of Women of Canada, which was founded in 1893, and the International Council of Women established in 1888.

PCWO's Affiliated Members are:

LOCAL COUNCILS:

Ottawa
Toronto
Hamilton
London,
Windsor
St. Catharines

PROVINCIALY ORGANIZED SOCIETIES :

Association of Early Childhood Educators - Ontario
Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Ontario
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Older Women's Network Ontario Inc.
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.
Ontario Farm Women's Network
Ontario Home Economics Association
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation
Ontario Women's Liberal Commission
Polish Alliance Ladies Circle
Polish Canadian Women's Federation
Salvation Army
Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada

PREAMBLE

The Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (PCWO) is pleased to present its 2004 Annual Brief to the Government of Ontario and looks forward to hearing of the actions planned by the Premier and appropriate Government Ministries to address our concerns.

This is the 81st Brief presented to the Government of Ontario. Over the past decades the PCWO has been a leader in bringing to the Government's attention, matters of concern to many Ontarians.

Established in 1923, as an affiliate of the National Council of Women (established in 1893) the aim of the Council is to work for the betterment of conditions pertaining to family, community and society.

PCWO is composed of 6 Local Councils and 13 Provincially Organized Societies. Each year these organizations research areas of concern such as: health, safety, education, environment, land-use, justice and seniors issues, to name a few. Each year resolutions are circulated to all of our affiliates for study and input. Resolutions are then presented to the delegates from each affiliate, possibly amended and then voted on. This grass roots process, following basic democratic principles, produces policies to present to the appropriate government ministry.

This year PCWO will be available on Monday, November 22 and Tuesday, November 23 from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm in Room 230 of the Legislative Building to present our Brief to our members. We look forward to a dialogue with the appropriate Ministers or their representatives on the content of the resolutions, which are presented in full on pages of this Brief. We also look forward to responses of all political parties.

These resolutions were approved by our membership for submission to the Government of Ontario. To assist in the review each resolution has been placed on a separate page. In addition to the resolutions, PCWO has included comments on emerging and current issues we wish to bring to the Government's attention.

2004 RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions in this Annual Brief were passed at the **81st Annual General Meeting** of Provincial Council of Women of Ontario in May, 2004, in St. Catharines, Ontario.

They are formulated by Local Councils of Women organizations from: Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Windsor, and St. Catharines; Provincially Organized Societies that belong to PCWO. They include:
Association of Early Childhood Educators – Ontario
Business and Professional Women’s Clubs of Ontario
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario
Older Women’s Network Ontario Inc.
Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association
Ontario Farm Women’s Network
Ontario Home Economics Association
Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation
Ontario Women’s Liberal Commission
Polish Alliance Ladies Circle
Polish Canadian Women’s Federation
Salvation Army
Ukrainian Women’s Association of Canada
And, by individual members.

They are compiled and studied by these organizations, and voted on at the Annual General Meeting. They represent the thinking of a wide variety of Ontarians.

POLICY UPDATES 2004

Policy Updates are revisions of previously approved policy that has been reviewed and updated.

EMERGENCY RESOLUTIONS

Emergency Resolutions are presented at the Annual General Meeting and are voted for acceptance as emerging issues that require action prior to the next Annual General Meeting.

ADEQUATE MINIMUM WAGE

Whereas: Ontario must honour the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which promises an adequate standard of living for all; and

Whereas: the Ontario minimum wage is at a poverty level and despite inflation has been frozen since 1995; and

Whereas: Minimum wage jobs are vital to the economy and 25% (1 in 4) of minimum wage workers are unable to earn enough to provide their families with an adequate standard of living; and

Whereas: recently promised increases to \$8 per hour over four years, along with increases in the cost of living, will not alleviate the difficulties low income workers face in providing for their families; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as its policy that the Ontario minimum wage shall ensure an adequate standard of living; and be it further

Resolved # 2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to raise the minimum wage to a level that ensures low wage earners an adequate standard of living, with further minimum wage increases being tied to the rate of inflation.

PROTECTION OF ONTARIO'S PARKS AND CONSERVATION RESERVES

Whereas: the Provincial Parks Act was last revised in 1954 when Ontario had only eight parks; and

Whereas: in 2002, Ontario had 277 regulated parks, but only 117 had management plans to ensure species and ecosystem protection; and

Whereas: inappropriate development proposals have been met with mitigation options or the ignoring of impacts; and

Whereas: Conservation Reserves, identified as ecologically sensitive areas, are being approved for mining claims and public motorized access to the networks of logging roads is being permitted; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves be protected; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to commit to the protection of parks and Conservation Reserves including species and ecosystem protection.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Whereas: the Ontario government is looking toward public-private partnerships (P3s) to meet the cost of new public infrastructure; and
- Whereas: P3s allow private investors to design, build and own public infrastructures which they then rent to the public sector, with rent payments assured from government tenants and profits going to private investors; and
- Whereas: experience in the United Kingdom and the United States has shown that in health care and education services may suffer, as for example the number of beds being cut and staff budgets reduced to ensure profit; and
- Whereas: private ownership brings the concern that within the health care system operational decisions affecting patient care may be controlled by investors rather than by knowledgeable medical staff; and
- Whereas: private financing costs the taxpayer more in the long run, in part because of the need for investor profit and the higher cost of borrowing, (as stated by Lewis Auerbach, former director of the office of the Auditor General of Canada); therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy the rejection of P3s for Health Care and Educational Institutions and for other essential public infrastructure; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to reject Public-Private Partnerships for Health Care and Educational Institutions and for other essential public infrastructure.

SERVICES FOR WOMEN RECENTLY RELEASED FROM PROVINCIAL CUSTODY

Whereas: incarcerated women pose a lower risk to the safety of the community on release than do men but have fewer release options; and

Whereas: the Government of Ontario withdrew funding support for most Half Way Houses for provincially sentenced women and men as part of the 'Common Sense Revolution'; and

Whereas: social conditions such as soaring housing costs, long waiting lists for affordable housing, and overburdened shelters in most Ontario cities result in high rates of homelessness and fewer options for the reintegration and rehabilitation of women released from incarceration; and

Whereas: most non-profit community organizations such as The Elizabeth Fry Society and the Salvation Army can run programmes and link women to essential resources, including addiction treatment, life skills training and affordable housing, effectively; and

Whereas: the cost of community release options is less than 20% of the cost of incarceration; and

Whereas: non-profit organizations require assured long-term funding to provide these services for recently released provincially sentenced women; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy the need for government funded support for non-profit organizations which provide services to aid the rehabilitation and reintegration into society of women recently released from provincial incarceration; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to commit the allocation of long term

funding to approved non-profit organizations to provide women recently released from prison options and resources for rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

POLICY UPDATES 2004

Policy Updates are revisions of previously approved policy that have been reviewed and updated.

Policy Update #1/2004

REGULATION OF NURSING HOMES AND REST AND RETIREMENT HOMES

Whereas: 1976 PCWO policy called for the “inspection of nursing homes and enforcement of legislation under the Nursing Homes Act”, and updated 2001 policy asked that the Government strike a Provincial Task Force on the operations and needed regulations for private rest and retirement homes and enact legislation based on the Task Force recommendations; and

Whereas: Provincial Legislation proscribes the rights of residents in private and public long term care facilities and the obligations of long term care operators, but a lack of Provincial enforcement of this legislation over several years has put vulnerable seniors at risk of neglect, injury and abuse, and this risk was exacerbated in the past few years by the removal of the required “minimum” hours per day of nursing care; and

Whereas: the results of mandatory inspections of long term care facilities are not made public, therefore restricting the ability of family members to be aware of the level of patient care being given; and

Whereas: residents in private rest and retirement homes are not protected by Provincial law; and

Whereas: in both private rest and retirement homes, and in regulated private long term care facilities, partially funded by the public, there are no mechanisms in place to ensure funds designated for patient care are spent on patients, or that institutional bankruptcies do not leave vulnerable people without care; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that:

- a) rights of vulnerable seniors in long term care institutions and rest and retirement homes, be fully protected by provincial legislation and regulations,
- b) institutions be subject to independent annual inspections, the results of which are made public,
- c) there be regulatory protections against financial abuse of residents; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario, urge the Government of Ontario to ensure that:

- a) the conditions for granting licenses for, and maintaining, a long term care facility be reviewed, updated and strictly enforced; and
- b) long term care facilities pass mandatory annual unannounced inspections and that the results be readily available to the public; and
- c) mandatory standards for the minimum amount of nursing care per resident per day, be reinstated at three hours; and
- d) legislation be enacted to protect the well being of residents in private rest and retirement homes; and
- e) owners of private long term care facilities and rest and retirement homes be required to post bonds, to be held by the Government in trust, in order to protect residents and that all residents' accounts be similarly held in trust with legislation covering their use; and
- f) the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care conduct rotating audits of these facilities to be reported to the Provincial Legislature or the Auditor General; and
- g) owners of long-term care facilities and rest and retirement facilities be required to ensure the security and safety of personal effects of residents; and be it further

Resolved#3

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to ensure that all staff of long term care institutions and rest and retirement homes be required to go through a criminal check to protect residents from known inappropriate care-givers.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Whereas: Provincial Council of Women policy 1995.7 asked the Government of Ontario to promote, as an alternative to incineration, proven reliable technologies, and continue the 3 R's Waste Reduction program, and, in 1998, supported the "institution through regulation of a comprehensive deposit return system for all beverage containers"; and
- Whereas: some municipalities in Ontario are desperate for quick disposal options and are seriously considering combustion technologies, such as municipal waste incinerators, which will work against successful and/or enhanced 3R programs, and could well negatively impact human health and the environment; and
- Whereas: many jurisdictions world-wide are adopting 'zero waste' strategies, systems and supportive regulations and legislation in order to conserve energy and resources, reduce waste, create jobs, conserve landfill capacity, enhance 3R programs and prevent air, water and soil pollution; and
- Whereas: while advanced municipal waste incineration/ combustion technologies would be required to meet the current A7 air quality regulations, these regulations need considerable strengthening as they measure concentration and not quantity of released contaminants; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that

- a) municipal waste incineration/combustion facilities be banned until proven safe to human health and environment;
- b) air quality standards be strengthened to reflect concentration and quantity of released contaminants;
- c) "zero waste" be a Provincial and municipal waste strategy goal, backed by producer responsibility legislation and strong government support of municipal 3R programs; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to

- a) re-institute the 1992 ban on municipal solid waste (MSW) incineration and ban other advanced combustion technologies - all until proven safe to human health and the environment;
- b) enhance its “producer responsibility” legislation to encompass the “life” of manufactured products;
- c) strengthen its Air Quality Standards (A-7s) to measure quantity as well as concentration of air emissions from the existing municipal incinerator.
- d) adopt “zero waste” as a Provincial and municipal strategy goal, backed by producer responsibility legislation and strong government support of municipal 3R programs.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING/HOSTELS

Whereas: 1982.16 PCWO policy urged the Government of Ontario to give a much higher priority to the acute need for a reliable, sustaining funding mechanism for the Ontario interval or transition houses and urged Local Council of Women to "...promote the value, use and availability of social services"; and

Whereas: homelessness and the lack of affordable housing is a crisis in municipalities across Ontario, and there are not enough emergency facilities to meet the growing need; and

Whereas: Provincial per diem subsidies for emergency accommodation do not provide adequate funds to administer and provide shelter support services that are holistic, meeting people's immediate and medium term needs; and

Whereas: the provision of supportive programs to individuals and families living in shelters, such as transitional supports and community development outreach programs, as well as programs for children, helps residents find jobs and affordable housing, and access other community supports; and

Whereas: the provision of emergency housing with early crisis intervention and support services, is much less expensive than the use of community services such as police, hospitals, etc. or the use of hotels and motels, which are not suitable environments for children particularly, and such investments will improve the quality of their lives and of all Ontarians; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that supportive emergency housing be built to meet the need; that emergency housing providers be funded adequately in the short and long term; and that Local Councils of Women and POS affiliates work to raise an awareness of the homelessness crisis and of the value of supportive services provided by emergency shelters; and be it further

Resolved #2

**That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the
Government of Ontario to:**

- a) recognize the current homelessness crisis and the value of emergency shelters in providing short term housing and early crisis intervention, as well as meeting people's needs in a holistic way, that improves their quality of life, and helps them find permanent housing and access to community supports;**

- b) invest in more emergency housing projects and provide adequate funding for the provision of emergency housing, early intervention support services, community development outreach activities and administrative overhead**

GROUNDWATER PROTECTION

Whereas: in 1989 PCWO drew attention to the risks posed by groundwater contamination to many people having to rely solely on groundwater for their needs, and asked for comprehensive action with regard to groundwater contamination, and in 1997, PCWO issued an update on this policy; and

Whereas: in May 2000 contaminated water resulted in seven deaths and 2,300 illnesses in Walkerton, Ontario; and

Whereas: the Ministry of the Environment has issued a white paper on watershed based source protection planning in February 2004, and is currently developing legislation to safeguard groundwater; and

Whereas: the proposed legislation puts a large part of the responsibility for developing, implementing, and monitoring plans for the protection of groundwater onto conservation authorities, but funding cuts over the past few years put these plans at risk; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that Ontario groundwater be comprehensively protected to ensure a continued adequate supply of safe groundwater; and be it further

Resolved #2

That Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to:

- a) develop legislation for groundwater protection; and
- b) reinstate conservation authority funding and broaden their mandate to allow them to help develop and implement integrated strategies for management and protection of groundwater.

PESTICIDES

Whereas: in PCWO policy 2000.10 – Regulation of Pesticide Use on Private Property – Enabling Legislation for Municipal By-Law Use – PCWO asks the Government to “pass legislation to enable municipalities to restrict or ban the use of pesticides on private property and encourage the use of safe and natural alternatives through education”; and

Whereas: the Ontario College of Family Physicians has reviewed over 200 world wide studies in depth and come to the conclusion that chemical pesticides are extremely dangerous to human health; and

Whereas: although the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that municipalities may pass by laws to severely restrict or ban the use of chemical pesticides for cosmetic use to protect the health of their citizens, and 60 communities have done so, this is a slow process with the health effects being suffered by many in the meantime; and

Whereas: there are alternatives to the use of chemical pesticides and a need for public education as to the dangers of pesticide use as well as its alternatives; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy that the use of chemical pesticides for cosmetic purposes be banned in Ontario and alternatives promoted; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to

- a) enact legislation to ban the use of chemical pesticides for cosmetic purposes

- b) regulate the use of chemical pesticides for infestations, and
- c) work with municipalities to educate the public as to alternatives to chemical pesticides.

ONTARIO'S DISASTER PREVENTION AND PLANNING

- Whereas in 2002 the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urged the Government of Ontario to:
- a) strengthen the Ontario Emergency Planning Act to better encourage and enforce emergency planning, audits and practices in the community
 - b) involve providers of home care, disabled, seniors and other vulnerable groups, in disaster planning
 - c) involve the women's anti-violence network in disaster planning and during disasters,
 - d) address internet terrorism and improve emergency training and information for the public; and
- Whereas the SARS health disaster of 2003 has exposed significant flaws in the health system re: planning for containment, management, and business/organizational continuity and recovery needs for highly infectious diseases, which should have the same emphasis in the Provincial Emergency Planning Act as other natural and human error or design disasters eg earthquakes, floods, bombings etc.; and
- Whereas there continues to be a relaxed attitude towards the need for disaster planning and practices to educate and train staff and community, and to identify areas of the provincial Emergency Planning Act that need readjustment; and
- Whereas there is a need for improved occupational safety for EMS and health care workers; and
- Whereas the business practice of 'just in time' supply management/delivery has reduced resources needed in disasters and prearranged plans, strategies and agreements to speedily transport supplies to the disaster site have not been developed; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy the need for a strong Provincial Emergency Planning Act that:

- a) addresses internet and other terrorist actions
- b) involves a widely representative group eg. service providers for the anti-violence network and the vulnerable, in its preparation
- c) establishes a periodic review body to address needs and suggest adjustments
- d) allows for the education and preparation of citizens regarding necessary actions in the event of highly infectious diseases and other natural and human error/design disasters, of either short or long duration
- e) ensures occupational safety for Emergency Measures Staff (EMS) and health care workers
- f) ensures disaster relief is delivered expeditiously

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to:

- a) ensure that the Provincial Emergency Planning Act is as strong as possible in preparing Ontarians in the event of highly infectious diseases and other natural and human error (or design) disasters, including internet and other acts of terrorism and,
- b) involve a widely representative group eg. the general public, the press, the front line emergency workers, service providers for the elderly, the vulnerable and the anti violence networks in the strengthening of the Emergency Planning Act,
- c) educate and prepare citizens in the event of highly infectious diseases and other natural and human error/design disasters, of both short and more lengthy duration,
- d) in the event of an emergency, ensure the occupational safety for EMS and health care workers, through the Health and Safety Act and the Emergency Planning Act,
- e) put plans in place to ensure that disaster supplies are delivered expeditiously

EMERGENCY RESOLUTIONS

Emergency Resolutions are presented at the Annual General Meeting and are voted for acceptance as emerging issues that require action prior to the next AGM.

Emergency Resolution #1/2004

PROTECTING FAMILY LAW

Whereas: The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the equality of women before the law; and

Whereas: Canada has ratified the Convention to Eliminate all Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and

Whereas: Family Law in Canada, though not perfect, applies equally to all Canadians; and

Whereas: unlike informal mediation, binding arbitration in Family Law cases would allow systems of law other than Canadian to determine issues such as inheritance, financial support for wives, alimony and child custody; and

Whereas: dealing with court backlogs and court costs in family disputes by alternative systems such as arbitration could lead to injustice for women and children; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy:

- a) support for a common civil code for all Canadian courts, particularly as it applies to family law
- b) that equality for women, imbedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, be respected in Family Law
- c) that binding arbitration be rejected for family law disputes
- d) that Canadian Law, rather than any alternative system, be followed in Ontario courts
- e) the need to find savings in court time and court costs that do not jeopardize justice for women and children; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario:

- a) to support a common civil code for all Canadian courts, particularly as it applies to Family Law,
- b) to respect equality for women, imbedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- c) to reject binding arbitration in Family Law disputes,
- d) to follow Canadian Law, rather than any alternative system, in Ontario courts; and be it further

Resolved #3

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to investigate and implement ways to save court time and costs that do not put the equality of women in jeopardy.

ANAPHYLAXIS MANAGEMENT PLANS

Whereas: anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction which can be life threatening. Food is the most common cause but insect stings, medicines, latex, or even exercise can also produce a reaction; and

Whereas: Bill 3: An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Students, a private member's bill, had first reading on November 24, 2003 and second reading on December 4, 2003 and must pass third reading before it can become law; and

Whereas: Bill 3 will require all Ontario publicly funded schools to establish anaphylaxis management plans; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario adopt as policy the need for all institutions dealing with children to have anaphylaxis management plans; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to proceed with Bill 3, An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Students; and be it further

Resolved #3

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario urge the Government of Ontario to ensure that all institutions dealing with children establish anaphylaxis management plans that would:

- a) inform institutions, children, and parent communities about life threatening allergies
- b) adopt measures aimed at reducing the risk of exposure to allergy causing substances for children who are at risk of a life threatening reaction
- c) train all people in supervisory positions to recognize the symptoms of allergic reactions and to follow an established emergency protocol

WATER TAKING

Whereas: water is not a renewable resource, but is in fact recyclable, and is of supreme importance for all human life; and

Whereas: the management of water takings is critical to protecting drinking water sources and for many other purposes, including sustaining the ecosystems; and

Whereas: in the White Paper on Watershed Based Source Protection Planning, the Ministry of the Environment sets out plans for scientific research into the relationship between water flow and aquatic ecosystems to determine the potential impact of water takings; and

Whereas: the Government of Ontario has placed a one-year moratorium on new and expanded water-taking permits that remove water from the watershed, and is in the process of reviewing the rules and processes for water taking; therefore be it

Resolved #1

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario establish as policy the necessity to base water taking permits on the amount of water available in a watershed that can be removed without damaging the ecosystem; and be it further

Resolved #2

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario commend the Ministry of the Environment for the moratorium, and urge that new water taking rules:

- a) be based on the total availability of water in the watershed that can be removed without damaging the ecosystem,
- b) include clear, legally established water use priorities; and be it further

Resolved #3

That the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario request the Government of Ontario to ensure that the Ministry of the Environment and the local Conservation Authorities have sufficient staff and resources to carry out the necessary studies and implementation of the new rules.

EMERGING AND ONGOING ISSUES

Provincial Council of Women structure has Vice Presidents responsible for the following portfolios: Economics, Education, Environment, Health and Safety, Housing and Land Use, Justice, Liaison, Mass Media and Culture, Social Development, Seniors, and Status of Women. It is their responsibility to bring to the attention of the Board and Membership emerging and ongoing issues.

The following highlights issues that PCWO wishes to bring to the attention of the Government. PCWO is allowed to present only those opinions, remarks, or comments that have been approved by the membership and adopted as policy. Therefore the following issues reflect PCWO Policies.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Children

Over the past nine years the Provincial Council of Women has advocated for children, as being left behind and needing our utmost attention. We are therefore pleased that this Government has a Minister of Children and Youth Services working cooperatively with the Minister of Community and Social Services to meet the many needs of children.

We commend the Government for facilitating the flow through of the five-year Federal Multi-Lateral funding for early learning and child care to municipalities, so that they can ensure child care spaces and adequate wages for staff in regulated facilities and reduce waiting times for parents. It is particularly important for parents receiving social assistance to have suitable childcare, in order to be able to find and keep jobs and to give their children a good head start.

PCWO also appreciates that the increase in the National Child Tax Benefit supplement will not be clawed back this year from persons receiving social assistance, and that the Minister of Community and Social Services is considering a three year phase-in to allow the whole supplement to flow to the poorest families in our society. This will be in line with the request of many municipalities, that within a reasonable time-line they find alternate funding for 'other' children's programs, rather than taking the funding from those most in need.

Over 40% of those receiving social assistance are children, and it is so important that they are fed, clothed and housed adequately. PCWO commends the Government for its prompt increase in the welfare rate of 3%, which is the first increase in 9 years. In your current review of welfare policy, we urge you to find a way, perhaps in co-operation with the federal government, to ensure income adequacy for families receiving social assistance and disability benefits.

Independence and Dignity for People Receiving Assistance

PCWO commends this Government highly for its intent to dispel welfare myths. None asks to be in need of social assistance and disability income, and the overwhelming majority of those needing assistance wish to be independent and live with dignity. The Government's move to end the punitive lifetime ban for welfare fraud; restore the nutritional supplement for pregnant women; end the rule that disallows social assistance recipients from saving for their children's future, while receiving assistance; and, recent indications from the Minister of Community and Social Services that even the term "workfare" will eventually disappear, will all go a long way to bringing about such "dignity" and "independence."

Ontarians with Disabilities

PCWO congratulates the Government for its introduction of Bill 118 that will eventually bring about complete accessibility for all Ontarians. Council has an abundance of policy in support of equal access dating back to 1975. Most recently, in 2003 Council adopted as policy the right of every person with a disability to access all goods, services and facilities. We also urged the Government, among other things, to establish standards of accessibility, time-frames for implementing the regulations and for compliance, and legislative review and enforcement provisions. Given the many daily difficulties persons with disabilities face, and the loss to families and communities of their employment skills, and other societal contributions, over very many years, this legislation is long overdue. We urge the Government to consider carefully the time-lines for implementation and compliance, with a view to shortening them if at all possible.

HOUSING

PCWO has for many years has been advocating for affordable, accessible and adequate housing and each year for continue to prompt the federal and provincial government to act upon this most pressing need; a need that continues to go unfulfilled each year even after negotiations between the federal and provincial government.

While we understand the priority the government has placed on health care we would suggest that investing in affordable housing is a responsible health prevention strategy. Studies dating back decades and on to the present have shown that lack of decent, stable, affordable housing impedes the health of our citizens. With 1 in 5 Ontario rental households paying over 50% of income for rent and 42% paying more than 30%, you can see the impact on the health of many low-income people. Families are the fastest growing group in shelters, and many more are lining up at food banks where the food available is not the best for good nutrition. Thousands of households have been on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing for many years; a high percentage of these are working poor. Vacancy rates may be rising but these are not affordable for low-income people. We urge you to reconsider the low priority you have placed on the construction of units affordable to low-income households.

We note that there are some funding enhancements for the homeless, but it does not seem to really meet the need for supportive housing. We appreciate that you have reinstated support funds for 2nd stage housing for victims of domestic violence and your additional funds for women's shelters for those fleeing violence. However, even with a high priority on the local waiting lists for victims of violence, many are stuck in shelters because no rent-geared-to-income units are available. These people, too, are affected by the lack of affordable rentals.

EDUCATION

PCWO has been actively watching the changes that have occurred in education over the past number of years. We have in the past prepared resolutions on Bill 74, the importance of physical education, curriculum, education funding, teacher monitoring, double cohort, teacher testing and funding for private schools

We commend the government for many of your new directions. In 2001 we were concerned with the lack of physical education; we are pleased to see that physical education is back on the agenda, along with, good nutrition.

We are pleased also with the cancellation of teacher testing and the private school tax credit and the spirit of cooperation between your government and the teaching profession, as you work co-operatively to ensure a better education for children, who are our future.

PCWO is monitoring the impact of student testing and drop out rates of high school students. It also continues to monitor the programs for, and investments in, children with “special needs” and children whose second language is English. We are particularly concerned about these most vulnerable groups and will continue our research that will provide them with the necessary tools to be successful students.

ENVIRONMENT

Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt and Provincial Planning Reforms

PCWO commends the Government highly for its recent draft land use planning reforms and public consultations. If the final legislation and policies are strong enough and well enforced, these visionary plans will protect our much valued Niagara fruit lands, the Escarpment Biosphere Reserve, the Oak Ridges moraine, hundreds of thousands of acres of prime class 1-3 farmland and key environmentally sensitive lands in southern Ontario from urban pressures. We are particularly appreciative of the Government’s intent to preserve the unique Niagara fruit lands through plans for “permanent” boundaries. We urge you, as we did in our 2001 Provincial Council of Women Annual Brief, to ensure this permanence through “a renewal of the 1994/95 Tender Fruit Land Program”. Only through the purchase of restrictive covenants that prohibit development “in perpetuity” will the land truly be protected for future generations of farmers and the public.

PCWO draws to your attention, however, the contradiction between Provincial plans to curb sprawl and the proposed urban infrastructure policy as found in its “Places to Grow.” document. We are disturbed that the “emerging centres” for growth, and several illustrated highways e.g. the 400 GTA East-West corridor, the extension of highway 407 eastward, and the mid

Peninsula corridor - the latter two possibly cutting through the Niagara Escarpment - will encourage sprawl onto prime farmlands and severely damage environmentally sensitive areas in the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt area.

Nuclear Power

While PCWO is pleased that the Government is entertaining bids for renewable and alternative electricity generation, we are alarmed that the government intends to refurbish and start up the very old and dangerous Pickering nuclear reactor, and to engage the private lease holders of the Bruce nuclear plant to bring other aging reactors back on stream, in order to fill a looming electricity gap. We reiterate our longstanding concerns about Ontario's over-reliance on nuclear power, and urge the Government once more to plan for a safer more sustainable energy future. This should include well-publicized and funded energy conservation plans for government, the private sector and the public; government purchase of substantially more power from alternative renewable energy sources; easier access to the grid for small electricity producers eg. homeowners and farmers; and, investments in the development and use of energy efficient technologies. As we noted in a recent brief to the Minister of Energy, "Ontario faces both a crisis and an enormous opportunity. The old system of reliance on nuclear power will not work. We urge you to be open to a very different approach to our energy future - one that makes public health and safety and environmental sustainability a cornerstone of Bill 100."

Superior Aggregates Quarry

PCWO continues to advocate a full environmental assessment of the proposed rock quarry in Michipicoten Bay. This ecologically significant area, lying between Pukaskwa National Park and Lake Superior Provincial Park, is critical to Lake Superior's role as part of the provincially designated "Great Lakes Heritage Coast". It deserves the more rigorous protection afforded by the Environmental Assessment Act, rather than the Aggregate Resources Act.

HEALTH

PCWO has expressed its concern to the Ministry of Health regarding the Community Care Access Centres and most recently on the RFP Process that has seen the demise of a most respected community health delivery agent – Victorian Order of Nurses. Although we are pleased that the Ministry is undertaking a review, we regret that it comes too late for the VON association in Niagara.

Further, we are concerned that the P3 process continues to exist. The most recent reports are predicting substantial cost overruns in the construction of the P3 in Brantford. We continue to urge the Government to reject this form of development since studies continue to prove that there are no cost benefits to the taxpayers.

It has come to the attention of PCWO that Bill 3, regarding anaphylactic students has not been passed. We urge the Government to reintroduce this most critical issue affecting children.

JUSTICE

At both the national and provincial level, the National Council of Women and the Provincial Council of Women have adopted as policy “Protecting Family Law”. PCWO has written to the Attorney General. PCWO reiterates that binding arbitration must be rejected for Family Law disputes as it contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protecting equality of women before the law and the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

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