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February 5, 2015

The Honourable Dr. Helena Jaczek
Minister of Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor Street
Hepburn Block – 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Dear Minister Jaczek:

In the spirit of our initial conversation when you became Minister, we know your door is open to us. As you know, there are deep concerns with the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). The AMO Board at its meeting last Friday was quite anxious about the situation. I know you are better briefed – that the implementation so far has proven almost impossible for both clients and administrators. Welfare operations are still in a state of crisis management three months after the introduction of the new software. It is clear to us that the system still has serious flaws, requiring both short and long-term resolutions. It is not just a matter of an IT implementation situation any longer. Our clients need front line case management supportive work, including employment services, not administrative work-arounds. We have a number of suggestions and are seeking further assurances from the Ministry that a resolution to the immediate crisis is in sight.

While the Ministry's efforts to address the initial problems are acknowledged, it is clearly not enough. More effort, activity, and resource expenditure is needed in light of the current situation. Front-line municipal staff is reverting to Business Recovery protocols and are performing a number of essential functions manually just to ensure that the system produces reliable, accurate, and timely payments to social assistance recipients. This is in our collective interests. However, this situation is clearly not sustainable. Municipalities and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) are facing mounting overtime costs to ensure that payment runs are successful. It is not acceptable that municipalities and DSSABs are incurring more ongoing costs associated with SAMS implementation. These costs cannot be considered part of the 50:50 administration formula. While the Province has provided some initial mitigation funding, the Province needs to step up immediately and assume 100% responsibility for all the short and long-term costs associated with the implementation of the government's new software system.

In addition to the immediate short-term issues, we are concerned with the long-term implications of using SAMS. It is not evident that SAMS is providing the intended service benefits as promised. As we understand it, SAMS is not handling well the myriad of rules and exceptions that govern Ontario Works. Basic functions such as client intake and

address changes take much longer to perform than the previous Social Delivery Model Technology (SDMT) system. There are also a number of accountability features not yet functioning in SAMS. This is affecting the ability to perform financial reconciliations. Again, manual work will be necessary to do what SAMS fails to do. All this will have long-term cost and service impacts which have yet to be assessed, let alone addressed by the Ministry.

In addition, the new operating reality is extremely stressful for front-line staff and is affecting relationships with clients. Caseworkers have less time to spend with clients, not more as was the promised benefit of SAMS. This appears to run counter to efforts the government is taking to transform social assistance delivery into a more client-focused system.

AMO is therefore calling upon the government to immediately:

1. Use all available means and resources to address the short and long-term implementation problems with SAMS.

We are seeking assurances that the Ministry and the IT software vendor are investing the necessary resources to address the issues. Also, we would like to see a provincial commitment to maintain the current levels of technical support until both the Ministry and the municipal sector are in agreement that the system is stabilized. There is also a need for the Ministry to reinstate its training program both for new staff and in some cases, the retraining of existing staff.

2. Reimburse municipalities and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) for the additional ongoing costs associated with SAMS until such time as the short and long-term implementation problems are resolved.

The Province needs to reimburse municipalities and DSSABs 100% of the additional costs associated with the implementation of SAMS. This includes both staff overtime and corporate administrative resources. While appreciated, the infusion of \$5 million to municipalities and DSSABs in December 2014 is insufficient to cover the costs incurred to date. A critical first step is for the Ministry to survey municipalities and DSSABs to track the additional resources that they are expending. The assessment should also include projections of the long-term costs of implementation.

Further, the Ministry needs to consider that municipalities and DSSABs will have serious challenges meeting their service plans and employment targets for 2015. It is recommended that the Ministry work with the municipal sector to determine what is reasonable in terms of 2015 reporting.

The Ministry is also requested to advise your sister ministries of the challenges faced by municipalities and DSSABs with the implementation of SAMS. We feel strongly that until SAMS is stabilized, municipal service managers are not in a position to take on any new workloads or reporting requirements for any provincially mandated human service program. All available resources are needed at present just to ensure that social assistance recipients receive reliable, accurate, and timely payments.

3. Work with AMO, municipalities, District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) and the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) to continue to identify the ongoing issues with SAMS implementation.

The municipal sector is committed to working with the Ministry to bring stability to the situation. A team approach is needed as the platform fix is worked on. At this point, there is a critical need for the municipal sector to have a well-constructed and realistic plan for 2015 and 2016 to address the immediate SAMS fixes as well as a centralized data clean-up. Our municipal service managers require clear timelines on when SAMS will operate effectively and efficiently so that they may plan and budget accordingly.

Lastly, we are concerned about the possibility of a provincial strike by members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). We are seeking assurances that the same levels of support to the municipal sector will be available in the event of a strike. Further, we would emphasize that the municipal sector cannot be considered as an alternative to help out with Ontario Disability Support Program service delivery in the event of a strike.

Minister, I hope we can sit down soon to discuss the way forward. Staff can contact Lorna Ruder in our office to organize a meeting. In the meantime, I would hope that we receive your written assurance that these matters are indeed within your focus.

Yours sincerely,



Gary McNamara
AMO President

cc: The Honourable Ted McMeekin, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Catherine Matheson, President, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association
Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services
Kristen Munro, Chief of Staff, Ministry of Community and Social Services