

**Groups demand that new minister Sam Hamad cancel planned welfare cuts**

Montréal, March 6, 2015. This morning, several groups and umbrella organisations denounced the cuts the MESS intends to do to social assistance programs. They are asking Minister Sam Hamad (recently nominated to the Employment and Social Solidarity Ministry) to withdraw the five new regressive measures contained in the draft amendment to the *Individual and Family Assistance Act* published last January 28 by his predecessor François Blais.

"The adoption of this draft regulation is claiming to remedy alleged inequities between welfare recipients and the rest of the population, but it will only give the force of law to prejudices," stated Me Stéphane Proulx from the *Services Juridiques Communautaires Pointe St-Charles Petite Bourgne*.

Michel Tourigny from the *Comité des sans-emploi de Pointe Saint Charles* explains that in practice very few recipients knowingly make false declarations to welfare regarding their earned income: "One of our users earns \$40 a week cleaning the house of a person with mobility issues. Knowing that she is entitled to earn up to \$200.00 a month without having her benefit reduced, she does not declare it to the welfare. With the new regulation, welfare will claim all this money she had the right to earn on the basis that she neglected to declare her exempted earnings. If Quebec wants to address the problem of fraud, they should look at Quebec's 750 million dollar problem of corporate and personal tax evasion and tax avoidance, instead of lashing out at the most impoverished people in our society."

The MESS will also attack recipients whose roommates are not included in the lease, stating they draw a profit from their cohabitation, an assumption which leads Jean Lalande from the Welfare Rights Committee of South West Montreal to say : "In good faith, the government should know that a person who has two roommates in a 5 1/2 is not running a rooming house and that landlords generally will not accept to register three names on a lease. Avoiding such evidences by regulatory formulations unrelated to real life is revolting." According to Anne Marie Boucher from *Réseau Solidarité Itinérance du Québec*, this measure will create more homelessness by penalizing people trying to reduce their housing costs.

Furthermore, the MESS will continue to go after people wanting to quit their addiction to drugs. "With the *Plan interministériel en Itinérance*, the government let it be known that they wanted to show greater solidarity towards people experiencing homelessness. By these measures, the MESS is instead going to instead increase the stigmatisation of people who use drugs and are living in a situation of homelessness," said Gedi from the *Association Québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices des drogues*. "How can we justify a measure that obliges people to chose between their meager social assistance benefits and the possibility of undergoing treatment? Supporting such people is a public health issue. In addition, these measures will likely imean that several treatment centres will have to close as their finances are weakened," added Martin Lafortune from Centre l'Exode, a member of the financial losses that *Association québécoise des Centres d'intervention en dépendance*.

Employment integration requires the improvement of living conditions and access to appropriate programs and support at each stage of professional reintegration. "For several years, in addition to downsizing, we have witnessed a dehumanization of the MESS services and a removal of welfare agents from Local employment centers. Under the pretext of efficiency, individual meetings in Emploi Québec offices with people who begin a professional reintegration process are being abolished and replaced by telephone interviews. Increasingly, people who need support are left to themselves", condemns Denise Boileau, vice-president of the *Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec*.

Lysiane Roch from the *Ligue des droits et libertés* adds : "For nearly a year, in the name of austerity, the government has adopted a series of measures that are absolutely incompatible with the enforcement of human rights. With these cuts, the government continues the attack and the dismantling of social programs

vital to the realization of human rights and are now lashing out at the poorest people in our society. The government must remember that under its international commitments, Quebec has an obligation to make progress in the enforcement of these rights and we will not accept that it keeps stepping back. The MESS should instead move towards a significant increase in welfare benefits, an unavoidable measure that must take place in order to make progress towards the enforcement of the right to a sufficient standard of living”.

The organizations are calling on Minister Hamad to implement changes that would actually support people so that they can move out of poverty, such abolishing the parental contribution, abolishing the clawback of child support payments, acknowledging the needs of adults living in couple (one person, one cheque) and increasing the allowable work income of people receiving social assistance.

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**Source :**

Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec (FCPASQ), Réseau Solidarité Itinérance du Québec (RSIQ), Ligue des Droits et Libertés (LDL), Regroupement des Auberges du Cœur (RACQ), Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté, Association québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices de drogue (AQPSUD), Association québécoise des centres d'intervention en dépendance (AQCID), Groupe de recherche et de formation sur la pauvreté, Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi (MASSE), Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec (SFPQ).

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