



August 16 2019
Kitchener

Dear Sir or Madam:

We are members of Disability and Human Rights Group, which is a forum for educating, raising awareness and discussing issues related to human rights and disabilities. The group was formed to provide a social forum for community members with disabilities and community members concerned with inclusion to respond to consultations on issues related to accessibility, disability and human rights. Our core members are individuals with direct lived experience with disabilities.

We urge the Ontario Government to retain the current definition of disability used when applying for needed government supports.

Over the past several decades, persons with disabilities have created self-definitions and sought to have those accepted and respected by the powerful. These efforts have led to United Nations' declarations, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and numerous decisions by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Definitions are powerful things, for they specify what is and is not that thing and thus limit any discussion of that thing. When applied to inanimate objects, a definition can be completely benign. When applied to a person or group of people, a definition is both powerful and dangerous, for it determines who is and is not included under that definition: who is 'us' and who is 'them.' Thus, by its nature a definition is divisive, creating a line of discrimination between 'us' and 'them.' Furthermore, definitions are created by those with power and imposed upon those without. Those who create definitions shall be judged for the definitions they create and the uses they make thereof, whether for good or ill, whether to marginalize and oppress the powerless, elevate the powerful, or create an equitable situation and society in which all persons have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

If the current Ontario Government proceeds with its plan to change the definition of 'disability' used for Ontario Disability Program applications, it will be a significant step backwards for persons with disability, and will unnecessarily leave many Ontarians in deep poverty. Even if the altered definition withstands a court challenge, the government's plan is politically unwise.



The current definition used by CPP is very outdated and restrictive. Our understanding is that it has not essentially changed since 1970 and that it predates Canada's acceptance of the UN Declaration on Disability. Society's understanding of disabilities, medical advances, new assistive devices and integrated living have all changed significantly in the last 50 years. The ODSP definitions, while not totally accepting of all disabilities, is far more modern, decent and fair to both those who are disabled and to those who support them.

The cuts already announced and enacted by the current Government have already had a negative impact on many of the people in Ontario and a disproportionately negative impact on people living with disabilities. Cuts to education, cuts to special funding for children with autism, the end of the guaranteed income pilot project, cuts to proposed increases for minimum wage, cuts to the benefits required of employers and cuts to the proposed increase of social assistance rates, changes to rent control are all areas that have a higher impact on people who live with disability.

Our group has a very diverse background and specialized knowledge that could give so much to any conversation about disabilities. Our disabilities are each unique and allow us to bring many different perspectives to the table. Disabilities can be lifelong or short term, something you are born with or acquired during your life time, hidden or overt, physical or cognitive.

We have offered to be a part of consultations in the past, (January 2019 pre-budget submission sent with no response) and would be happy to be of help in the future. We are looking forward to being able to work with you.