

**Submission on Bill 152:
Poverty Reduction Act, 2009 to the
Standing Committee on Social Policy**

Speaking Notes

April 21, 2009

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)

Speaking Notes for Bill 152, Poverty Reduction Act, 2009
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Good afternoon. My name is Doris Grinspun and I am the Executive Director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Every day registered nurses across the province are working with their clients and neighbours as they struggle to meet basic needs for nutritious food, affordable shelter, and human dignity. From our nursing practice and from a growing body of scientific evidence, we know that poverty harms health and puts people at a greater risk for early death throughout the life cycle.

As poverty is such a threat to the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities, RNAO welcomed the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* in December 2008 as a strong start to building a stronger, healthier, more inclusive society. Now more than ever in these challenging economic times, bold and sustained leadership is required because the promise of this strategy must be fully realized in improved living conditions and healthier, longer lives for all Ontarians.

RNAO urges the Standing Committee on Social Policy to strengthen Bill 152 so that it will more effectively fulfill its purpose of establishing mechanisms to support a sustained long-term reduction of poverty in Ontario. RNAO's recommendations for amendments and their rationales are explained in detail within our written submission but I would like to emphasize a few key points:

Vision of a Poverty-Free Ontario

In order to build a stronger, healthier, more inclusive Ontario, we need to work together toward a vision of a poverty-free province rather than the more modest and ambiguous goal of reducing poverty. We need to be explicit about the final destination as a province without poverty while recognizing various measures of poverty reduction as necessary intermediate steps towards the ultimate goal.

A Comprehensive Strategy Must Not Exclude Adults

While RNAO fully supports the need to reduce child and family poverty, it is also essential that single adults not be excluded from a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty.

Enhance Enforcement of Equality Rights through the Ontario Human Rights Code

Principle 3 of this Bill recognizes that immigrants, single mothers, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, and racialized groups currently have a heightened risk for living in poverty. To give this important principle teeth, it is essential to make an explicit link with human rights legislation as a mechanism to address discrimination. A human rights approach would also be consistent with Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of him-[her]self and of his [/her] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his [/her] control.”

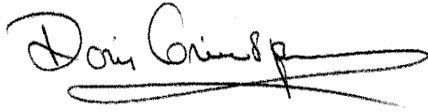
Strengthen this Bill to Increase Transparency, Accountability, and Public Engagement

RNAO joins with other community members such as the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction in urging that this Bill be strengthened by:

- Making it explicit that the specific target for poverty reduction shall represent a substantive reduction in poverty within the next five years.
- An independent person or group, within four years of the release of *Breaking the Cycle—Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*, should be appointed to undertake a review of the implementation and effectiveness of the poverty reduction strategy. This independent review should be tabled in the Legislature in order to enhance accountability, transparency, and credibility.
- It is essential that a meaningful consultation process be initiated so that those who have direct experience with poverty and social exclusion would be encouraged and have the opportunity to fully participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the poverty reduction strategy.
- The Government will then be able to issue a revised long-term poverty reduction strategy for Ontario based on the independent review.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the opportunity to provide these recommendations that we hope will help realize the vision of a poverty-free Ontario.

Are there any questions?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doris Grinspun". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD(c), O.O.N.T.
Executive Director, RNAO