

NEWS RELEASE
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“The Common Front for Social Justice is shocked by the Shawn Graham government’s decision to abandon people living in poverty,” says Linda McCaustlin, co-chair of the Common Front.

In its last budget, Graham’s government decided to cut taxes for corporations and individuals, a decision that will help the most financially comfortable New Brunswickers. This will cost the government \$150 million, yet this did not seem to pose a problem for the finance Minister. But when it comes to help the most vulnerable families and children in the province, Premier Graham says it can’t be done. Raising the social assistance rates to the Atlantic average, as was promised in the Charter for Change, would cost approximately \$30 million.

New Brunswick has the lowest social assistance rates in the Atlantic Provinces. Our province also ranks last in the country for 3 out of 4 household categories. Another source of provincial shame: we have the lowest minimum wage in the country. It’s no wonder our food banks served 16,347 individuals in 2007 – 33% of which were children. The social assistance rates don’t allow for individuals and families to live above Statistic Canada’s low income cut-off: a single mother with one child, for instance, receives \$15,451 on social assistance – an amount far, far below the low income cutoff of \$23,084.

Most Canadian provinces, including New Brunswick, are developing strategies to reduce poverty. While this is a very positive thing, Graham’s decision to break his promise to raise social assistance rates to the Atlantic average leaves us very concerned. Will the Poverty Reduction Strategy be another dead-end road?

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