

News release
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Moncton - “We are very happy to hear from Minister Stultz that the welfare rates are going to be increased”, Linda McCaustlin, Co-Chair of the Common Front for Social Justice.

“The promise made yesterday by the Minister is very encouraging. We hope this government will implement it right away. People living on social assistance are hurting right now”, says Ms. McCaustlin.

Last year, people who have to rely on welfare payments to live have seen their measly 2% increase on their basic rates cut back by the former Liberal government. At the same time, the price of food in New Brunswick had gone up by over 5%. New Brunswick food banks saw an increase of 14% in 2009 and another 4% this year. Sixty six percent of their clients are individuals and families who depend on welfare (1).

“We can agree with the Minister that raising welfare rates is not the only solutions to combat poverty. However, if you don’t have enough money to feed yourself or your family, there is no way you will be able to participate in the programs geared to returning to work. We are also pleased Minister Stultz is planning to bring in a dental and vision plan for children from low-income homes. This will improve their ability to learn and foster a positive self-image”, continues Ms. McCaustlin.

Our province is the one that is the least generous in helping people living on social assistance. In 2007, the National Council of Welfare estimated the 2007 Annual Welfare Incomes by type of household for the different Canadian provinces and presented for four different scenarios (single employable, person with a disability, lone parent with one child and couple with two children). The annual welfare income takes into account the basic social assistance, additional social assistance program benefits, Federal child tax benefits, provincial child benefit, Federal GST credit and provincial tax credits. The comparison between the Canadian provinces is startling. In 2007, and there would not be major changes since then except for the Single Employable category, New Brunswick had the lowest annual welfare income for single employable persons (\$3,574), for persons with a disability (\$8,275) and for couples with two children (\$18,849). The only category where the province of New Brunswick was not last was for lone parents with one child (\$15,451) where we ranked seventh. If we were comparing only the basic social assistance rate, New Brunswick would be the last of the pack in the categories of single employable persons, persons with a disability and couples with two children. Only two provinces, Quebec and Alberta, had lower rates compared to New Brunswick for the category of lone parents with one child. (2)

“We urge Minister Stultz to keep her promise and convince her other Cabinet colleagues, especially Minister Blaine Higgs from Finance, to increase the basic rates right now.

1. Hunger Count 2009 and 2010.
2. National Council of Welfare, Welfare Incomes, 2006 and 2007, winter 2008, vol. #128

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