

Social assistance raise urgently needed

Presentation made by Johanne Petitpas, Secretary of the Common Front for Social Justice
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The promises of social welfare raise

Here are the words of Shawn Graham as they appeared in his election platform one year ago: "New Brunswick has some of the lowest social assistance rates in Canada; the aid we provide to the poorest of the poor is inadequate. So too are the supports we provide to the working poor, who, despite having a job, continue to live in poverty. For these two groups, it is a struggle to afford basic needs – food, shelter and clothing. There is rarely money left over to cover transportation and child care. This is often a barrier to employment. A Liberal Government will introduce programs to assist people living in poverty as they enter the workforce....A Liberal Government will review the current social assistance rates paid to recipients and the programs available to people on social assistance with the goal of raising rates to the average for Atlantic"

The facts

In order to appreciate the meaning of this promise, the Common Front for Social Justice did some calculations of what it means in terms of the amount of monthly raise in social assistance. We used the well-researched numbers from the National Council on Welfare for the year 2005 These are included at the end of my presentation. The values for 2006 are not available yet.

Single employable people. This group of welfare recipients are the worst off in Atlantic as well as in all of Canada. The average basic social assistance rate for single employable people in Newfoundland, PEI and Nova Scotia was \$510 in 2005, compared to only \$267 in New Brunswick. We are aware that there has been an increase of approximately 3.2% in the New Brunswick rates since 2005. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in 2005, the New Brunswick rate was \$243 less per month than elsewhere in Atlantic. If one counts the Federal GST refund, the three Atlantic Provinces' average was \$551 per month, compared to \$265 only in New Brunswick.

Persons with disability. In the three other Atlantic Provinces, the average welfare cheque for this group was \$648, compared to only \$564 for New Brunswickers. If one adds all other benefits received, the Atlantic average was \$742 per month, compared to only \$666 for New Brunswickers.

Lone parent with one child. In the three other Atlantic Provinces, the average welfare cheque a single parent with one child received was \$843, compared to only \$738 for a New Brunswick mother with her child. If one adds all other benefits received, the Atlantic average was \$1,189 per month, compared to \$1,138 in the case of New Brunswick.

Couple with two children. In the three other Atlantic Provinces, the average welfare cheque for a couple with two children was \$1,064, compared to only \$827 for a same size family in New Brunswick. If one adds all other benefits received by this family, the Atlantic average was \$1,662 per month, compared to \$1,462 in the case of New Brunswick

When will the promises be fulfilled?

The new Liberal Government has fulfilled several of its election promises but has left many as unfulfilled or only partially fulfilled. It has raised minimum wage by 50¢. It has reduced some of the taxes on gasoline, etc. However, the cost of Premier Shawn Graham's electoral promises for social assistance raise had not been calculated at the time of election. One can wonder how serious this electoral promise was.

Today, several other social advocacy group, namely Vibrant Community, le Comité des 12 and ourselves at the Common Front for Social Justice, we are frustrated with this long wait time to get what we consider a long overdue raise.

During the Spring of 2007, the Common Front for Social Justice conducted a post card campaign and we got strong support from over 10,000 New Brunswickers for an immediate raise in social welfare rates. During the election campaign, Shawn Graham had promised that this would come into effect as soon as he was elected, not within the four years of his mandate. Today, we are asking you to commit yourself on when this will come about.

Graphic illustrations of the monthly social assistance rates in Atlantic Canada

The eight following figures show the monthly basic social assistance rates, by types of household, and the total welfare income per month for Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. These numbers are based on the 2005 report from the National Council of Welfare (pages 20 and 11).

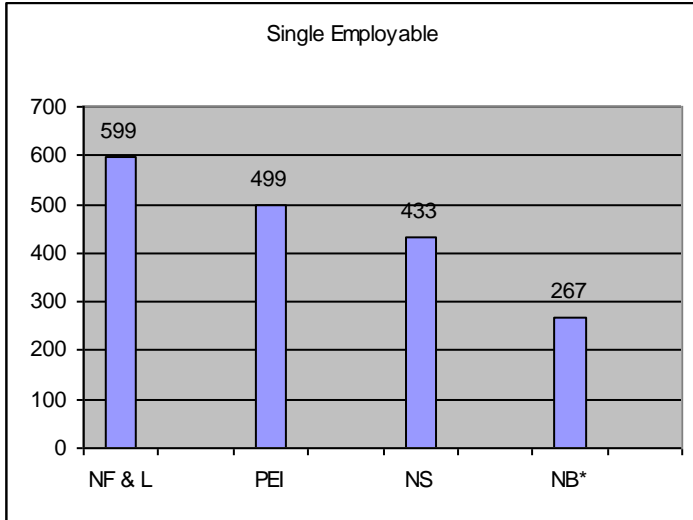


Figure 1. Basic social assistance per month (\$) for a single employable person

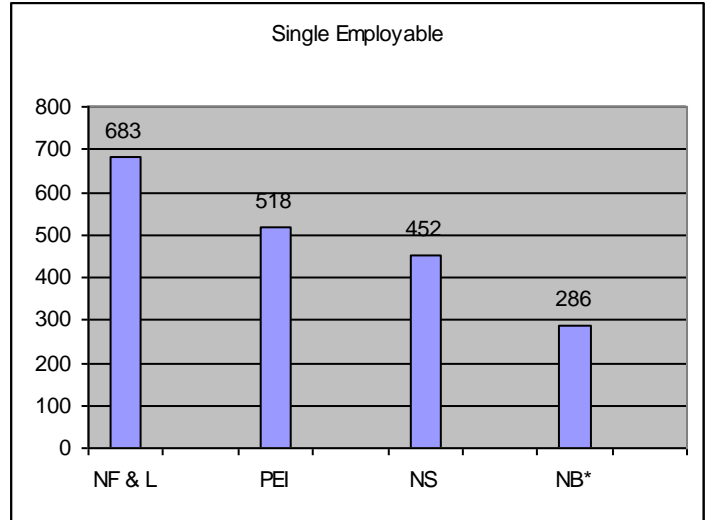


Figure 2. Total welfare income per month (\$) for a single employable person

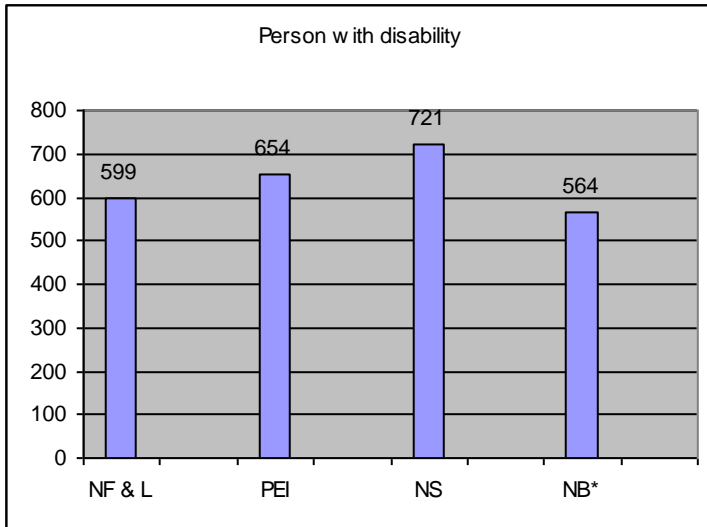


Figure 3. Basic social assistance per month (\$) for a person with a disability

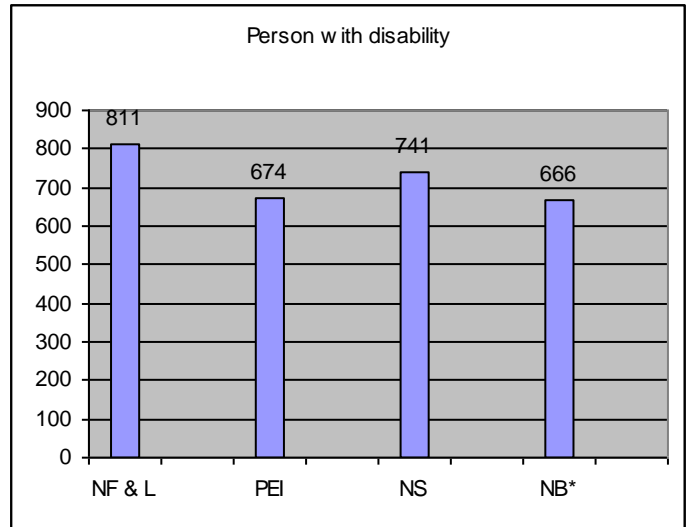


Figure 4. Total Welfare income per month (\$) for a person with a disability

* New Brunswick social assistance rates have increased by approximately 3.2% since 2005

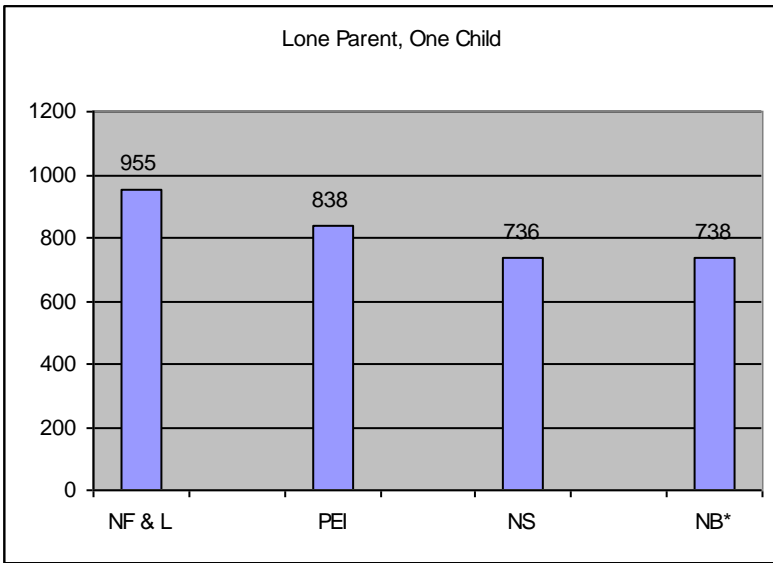


Figure 5. Basic social assistance per month (\$) for a lone parent with one child

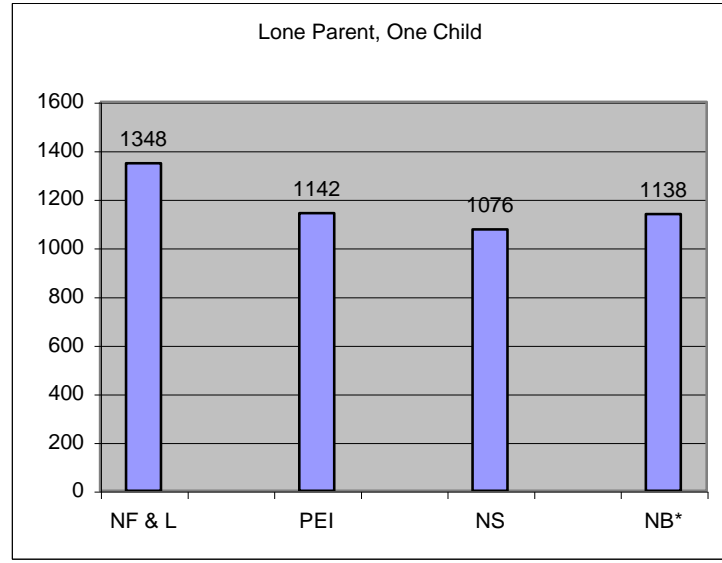


Figure 6. Total Welfare income per month (\$) for a lone parent with one child

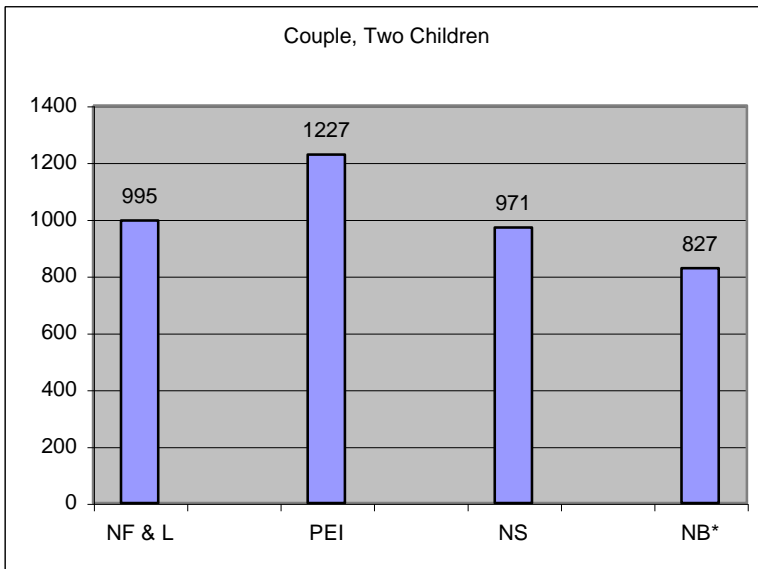


Figure 7. Basic social assistance per month (\$) for a couple with two children

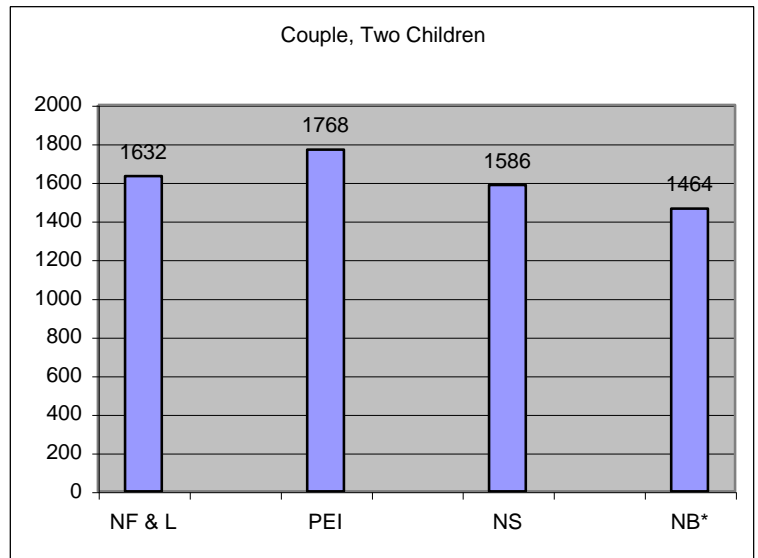


Figure 8. Total Welfare income per month (\$) for a couple with two children.

* New Brunswick social assistance rates have increased by approximately 3.2% since 2005

