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April 24, 2024

To Whom it May Concern,

Let me start by introducing myself. I have been and still am the Executive Director of Sonshine Families and Sonshine Community Ministries for the past 33 years. I am also the immediate past president of ORCA and a former member of OARTY. In these roles I have had dialogue and/or meetings with you, other members of the ministries team in the Eastern Region and senior leadership at Corporate in Toronto. However, today I am writing you in connection with my role as President of APODS – Agencies Providing Ontario Developmental Service. While supportive of the good work of both ORCA and OARTY, we became aware that the demands they have in working with the Ministry of Children and Youth have left little time to address the needs and concerns for Developmental Services Sector. After much discussion and consideration it was strongly felt that an association of OPR's was needed to specifically represent the OPR's working the Developmental sector. This association was established and incorporated as a not for profit during the fall of 2023. The key leadership team are all former directors of ORCA. We have started in the Eastern Region with the intention to spread across the province. The mandate of the APODS is as follows:

- To facilitate clear and concise communication with the Ministry of Social Services in dealing with Ontario Developmental Services
- To foster a collaborative relationship with the ministry in regards to enhancing future developments of programming that they may be initiating.
- To facilitate clear and concise communication with Transfer Payment Agencies to whom we are accountable and to other similar entities. (Note: to this end our interactions with SCS have been positive and constructive.)
- To create a common reference and contact point for our members when help or information is required. Also to support shared training and costs.
- Our members will include for profit organizations, not for profit, sole proprietors and registered charities that provide services in the Developmental Sector field.

Our members representing the vast majority of the Eastern Region serviced by SCS last year provide programs and care to 429 different clients requiring Developmental Services. The services include: Group homes for clients of varied needs including complex care; family led homes, Day Programs (for various target groups), ESIL, SIL, Respite and Day and Residential camps.

We would like to make you aware of the challenges that our members are facing:

- In this sector there is not provision for a rate review or mechanism to address our costs.
- The last rate increase was at least 7 years ago for any of our members and longer for others.
- Stats Canada using the Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator for the “basket” of goods and services confirms a decline of 23.02 percent in the money value over the past 7 year period. This loss of value is having a negative financial impact on our member’s ability to adequately manage the costs of operating our programs and services. We are asking the Ministry to ensure that the **value** of payment through our rates stays at least 0% annually. That would enable us to keep pace with the increasing basket of goods and services cost. Failure to do so will result in program and service losses.
- Other operational cost not captured in the food basket:
 - Insurance which has increased 70%
 - Transportation costs increased 35%
 - Vehicle acquisition increases in the last 7 years: Caravan’s were \$25 -30,000 they are now \$52 – 58,000; Pro-Master’s were \$40,000 they are now \$110,000.-\$115,000.
- Administration Costs changes and challenges over the last 7 years:
 - No provision for increased income of management staff that are personally faced with the same inflation costs noted above.
 - Increase management work load and or staff to implement and maintain QAM (which we support), pandemic measures, additional training now required for them to provide to front line staff. There has been no increase to cover these costs. Just the suggestion “suck it up” . The “administration cost” is now at the breaking point due to underfunding. This needs to be addressed. Again our annualized dollar needs to be kept at zero compared to inflation.
- Front Line staff. The wage enhancement was helpful. It resulted in our members having a starting wage of \$23.00 per hour. That is far below the market average. Canada Job Bank states that the average wage for DSW’s in our market is \$29.00

per hour. The above figures do not include the MERCS which range from 15 to 18%. Other provincially funded ministers are paying the average. This means when we hire “new” staff entering the field we frequently lose them to the Ministry of Education, Health and even LTC because they pay the higher average levels and at times more. Across the river in Quebec PSW’s start at \$29.00 per hour. Many of our staff take on other part time employment to exist. This turnover results in high training costs to our members.

- The Community Programs, primarily Day programs, Camps and some Respite are operating well and within their budgets. You will be aware that much of these costs are covered by Passports funding. The majority of these programs are full with waiting lists.

We trust that you will take this information into consideration as you are working on the budgets for 2024-25. We are certainly open to further discussions with you and your colleagues on this urgent matter.

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President APODS

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