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Scrap SAMS and let us help those in need, say Ontario Works staff
Vulnerable are suffering while government tries to save face

TORONTO, Ont. – SAMS, the problem-plagued case management system at Ontario Works, is not fit for purpose and can only deliver greater suffering for vulnerable people on social assistance and more problems for the workers who serve them, charge representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

They are calling on Minister of Community and Social Services Helena Jaczek to scrap the system that has caused such havoc in the lives of Ontarians in need and return to the system that better suited the needs of clients and workers alike.

The demand followed several near-unanimous polls by CUPE members about the appalling effects of SAMS on their clients and in the workplace. Over 500 CUPE members, or over 20 percent of CUPE members working in Ontario Works offices, took part in a ‘telephone town hall’ convened expressly to discuss the problems created by SAMS, the Social Assistance Management System introduced across the province last month.

Fred Hahn, President of CUPE Ontario, noted that CUPE members flagged problems with SAMS during early training sessions in the summer.

“While government talks about ‘glitches’ in the system, our members know that the problems are systemic. Official reports of a small number of inconveniences to social assistance recipients simply do not mesh with what CUPE members are dealing every day, supporting vulnerable people who have become desperate, some facing eviction, because of late or missed payments,” he said.

Chair of CUPE’s Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee, Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, supported this view, adding, “Our members have said enough is enough: we demand a return to sanity and a return to the system that allowed our members to do their jobs and help the people they are meant to serve.”

In view of its concerns about SAMS’ overall costs, currently pegged at \$250 million, CUPE also intends to file a Freedom of Information request to learn the true costs of the system’s implementation, including endless ‘fixes’ and massive overtime costs incurred to address missing or incorrect payments.

Poole-Cotnam concluded: “CUPE is not alone in rejecting SAMS; On Wednesday, Hamilton City Council members voted unanimously to send a letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne to request ‘that immediate steps be taken to return to the previous system.’”

This week the Minister agreed to a conference call with CUPE to discuss the issues around SAMS and the union will seek a face-to-face meeting with her with in early January.

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