

Coming budget must deal with crisis in developmental services, say frontline workers

Call to address critical needs of families follows interim report from Select Committee on Developmental Services

TORONTO, Ont. – Following the release of the interim report of the Select Committee on Developmental Services, frontline workers called on the government to invest funding for real solutions in the upcoming budget.

“Only adequate, urgently needed funding can address the critical and desperate situations that are outlined in the interim report,” said Joanne Smithers, a developmental service worker with Community Living Guelph-Wellington and president of CUPE Local 4392.

Smithers herself gave a presentation to the committee during its public consultations, based on her own experiences of delivering supports with insufficient funding amidst cuts to staff hours for programs and services.

The upcoming budget is the perfect time to address the critical issues raised in the report, she continued. “By ensuring adequate funding, as a matter of urgency, for supports and services for people with developmental disabilities, the government could ensure that the system doesn’t rely on families getting to a crisis point before services are provided.”

The interim report offers example after example of the difficulties facing families in accessing services and agencies. The range of experiences demand a comprehensive strategy, said Smithers, one that will require investing in services and supports.

It must also provide real solutions that ensure that every family has the support needed from qualified, trained support workers.

However, Jim Beattie, Chair of the CUPE Developmental Service Sector Coordinating Committee, raised an early concern that the government is failing to take concrete action and ignoring the very concerns raised in the Select Committee’s interim report.

He referred to the ongoing situation of Nicholas Spagnuolo, who was born with cerebral palsy and has autism and dementia. Having sought and exhausted all avenues for support, the 31-year-old’s parents took him to Ottawa Hospital in November, where he has remained in the acute care facility, confined to a hospital room and under guard by hospital security.

Another case was raised as recently as February 27 on the floor of the Legislature, when the Minister of Community and Social Services refused to provide a guarantee of residential support to a 34-year-old woman with severe disabilities. Shay Nakhdjavan has been on a waitlist for 20 years; her parents are ageing and experiencing their own health issues, yet their daughter is still not receiving the 24/7 residential care that she requires and that specialists recommend.

Beattie charges that this recent example of inaction indicates that the government is abandoning the responsibility to ensure that there are residential supports for those who need them.

There are more than 23,000 individuals with developmental disabilities in Ontario on waitlists for support, including 12,000 families on waitlists for residential supports.

For more information, contact:

Joanne Smithers, President, CUPE Local 4392: 519-820-5945

Jim Beattie, Chair of the CUPE Developmental Service Sector Coordinating Committee:
905-928-0030

Mary Unan, CUPE Communications: 905-739-3999 ext. 240 or 416-206-5609