To Your Honorable Kathleen Wynne, June 21, 2017

The following letter is in response to the recent announcement to the minimum wage to $14.00 an hour in 2018 and $15 an hour in 2019. I have the privilege of filling the role of the President of The Ontario Homes For Special Needs Association (OHSNA). With this role, it is my responsibility to act on behalf of the Homes for special Care in Ontario, The Supportive housing homes (former Domiciliary) and their clients.

The above announcement will most definitely have a serious impact on these homes that provide housing to such a vulnerable group. As recently as this month two homes in the Barrie area have already closed their doors. This results in a total upset to the clients that reside there, as there are no other homes in the area with vacant beds, thus resulting in having to leave the community they know. Our homes are not financially sustainable today to operate let alone when these increases to our expenses take place. In March of 2016, your government announced the modernization of the Homes for Special Care Program. This was a very progressive and promising approach to provide Best Practices for our clients this will also eventually take place in the Supportive Housing Program for the Ministry of Housing. The issue is the length of time it has taken to occur, we are now looking at January 2018 for implementation. As homes have already started to close due to lack of necessary funding to operate, it is safe to assume this will continue until the problems are addressed. The recent announcement regarding minimum wage has ensured this will cause many more closures, unless your government compensates the perdiem to address these new exorbitant expenses.

Over the past several years our homes have only received one 3% cost of living increase. Taking into consideration the 40% increase in hydro and 35% increase in just food, it is clear to understand why homes cannot function anymore. However, we cannot understand why this is not clear to the government as we as home owners have not been provided with near the cost of living over past years to be able to operate our facilities. The failure to react to inflation in respect to our homes is truly unfair and irresponsible to our clients.

Our homes receive slightly over $2 a day for nutrition as per your breakdown in the 2003 HSC guidelines. When we pointed this out to the ministry they simply removed this breakdown without any sort of replacement or compensation to alleviate the neglect. This figure is significantly lower than that of jails who receive over $11.00 a day and nursing homes who just got an increase of double of what they asked for to make it over $8.00 a day. With that announcement it was said so they could purchase fresh food from local markets, meanwhile we cannot even follow the Canada food guide on our budget?? We have continuously asked the question why do our clients who suffer from severe mental health illness not receive the same benefits?

OHSNA has continued to work hard with the Ministry of health providing numerous hours and expertise to ensure the success of the modernization of HSC. To date we have yet to get any kind of a commitment back to ensure the proper funding will be attached to make this process even possible. It is getting continuously harder to keep operators on board with the lack of government commitment. When I have pushed for any kind of possible figures from our government officials I was told they could tell me nothing and they were not playing that game. I am sorry but this is not a game to us!! This is our future and homes for our clients. Homes have already closed and this will continue, how can this be a game?

Without an announcement of an increase in perdiem to the homes quickly to an appropriate amount reflecting the years of being ignored and the recent announcement regarding minimum wage the result of clients losing their housing due to closures will most certainly continue. It is clear the increase in expenses with staffing will not be the only increases to follow from this announcement. The entire cost of living will go up dramatically as all businesses and services will need to increase their charges to compensate for the new increase cost of staff.

Unfortunately, we don’t have that luxury, our homes depend on the government to recognize such increases and reflect them in our perdiem annually. The evidence of lack of cost of living increases over the past 10 years proves they have failed our clients. Other certain negative impacts that will occur will be layoffs, decrease in employee’s hours and business closures. In fact, individuals who will receive the benefits from the increase in minimum wage won’t really see any extra funds. The extra dollars will be eaten up with the increase to cost of living. This increase was far too dramatic at one time to expect small businesses to be able to swallow the loss and increase expenses.

This government has made a promise to prevent and end homelessness. This announcement has single handedly prevented this promise from being fulfilled. Unless you want to see more vulnerable people on the streets without housing, it is essential to release a follow up announcement stating their will be a similar increase to our funding to compensate for this announcement.

I am looking forward to a prompt response from yourself in accordance to our concerns. As time continues to go on more homes will close and more vulnerable individuals will be without housing. I know this is not your intention but it is a reality. Please act quickly on behalf of our clients. They have been forgotten for far too long!!

Yours Respectfully,

Connie Evans

President of the Ontario Homes for Special Needs