

1. The Social Assistance System

As noted earlier, social assistance rates vary greatly across Canada, with no national standard, and many witnesses told the Sub-Committee that these rates are too low. Recall, for example, the testimony received from Equal Justice for All, which indicated that in Saskatchewan a family of eight receives, per person per day, \$2.08 for shelter, \$0.25 for utilities and \$4.13 for all other needs,¹⁴⁶ and from the Nova Scotia Nutrition Council regarding the 63% of the nutritional needs of children which would be met based on that province's social assistance food rates.¹⁴⁷ Although not directed specifically to the situation of families on social assistance, Family Service Canada told the Sub-Committee that:

(T)he [poor] family is faced with constant decisions. Do we go to the medical clinic or do we not, because that requires a bus fare? Do I keep my child at home this week because he is going on a school outing and it requires \$3 to pay for a small snack at the museum? Do I keep my child at home when there are other outings and activities because there is a \$2 requirement for juice and other nutritious kinds of snacks? ¹⁴⁸

Equal Justice for All told the Sub-Committee of situations where the rights of social assistance recipients have allegedly been violated. It shared the following story with the Sub-Committee:

(A)n individual . . . came to [Equal Justice for All] for help. He was forced into a work activity project. The man was a nursing assistant and he was a pianist. When he objected to being forced to (do) construction work while he sought his own employment, he was cut off assistance for three months. He became extremely depressed and we believe suicidal.¹⁴⁹

While the Canada Assistance Plan requires an appeals procedure in order that social assistance recipients can appeal the decisions made with respect to their case, it is not clear to the Sub-Committee that these appeals procedures are serving the purpose for which they were envisioned.

Further, Equal Justice for All told the Sub-Committee that in Saskatchewan:

[one] thing that is very punitive is that the federal (F)amily (A)llowance is deducted from people on welfare, so people on welfare in Saskatchewan do not even get that transfer payment.¹⁵⁰

The Sub-Committee recommends that:

B1 a Federal/Provincial/Territorial Task Force be established to develop Provincial/Territorial standards for basic social assistance and supplementary benefits that would ensure that the basic needs of adults and children are met.

B2 in order to ensure that families have adequate discretionary income to provide for the educational, recreational and cultural needs of their children, the value of federal child-related benefits not be deducted from social assistance income.

¹⁴⁶ *Proceedings*, Issue 13, p. 90.

¹⁴⁷ *Proceedings*, Issue 10, p. 79.

¹⁴⁸ *Proceedings*, Issue 13, p. 77.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.