



# Ontario **ACORN** People's Platform

*Working families in Ontario are feeling the pressure from all angles.* Stagnant low wages and job losses in combination with inflation high rents are heightening poverty in Ontario. In the manufacturing sector alone, 150,000 Ontario jobs have been lost in the past two years. Meanwhile, last year corporate profits soared at \$200 billion. In an in-depth 2005 report, Statistics Canada outlines clearly how stagnant minimum wages combined with economic inflation can lead to increased crime rates. Further, living conditions are deteriorating from the high crime, youth violence, increasing substance abuse, unsafe, unhealthy and deplorable housing conditions. The connections are very clear, increasing financial stress is leading to the break down of our social structures, our communities and our health. *Our provincial government is failing us and we demand immediate action.*

## 1). **TENANTS RIGHTS:**

- An immediate 5 year Rent Freeze with vacancy rent control introduced
- Implement **minimum** fines for landlords. (Currently there are **maximum** fines of \$25,000 for individual landlords and \$100,000 for corporations.)
- Eliminate fees for tenants taking action against their landlord at the Landlord and Tenant Board
- Implement legislation making it mandatory for landlords to obtain a license, and maintain it in good standing to be able to continue renting.
- Allocate \$1.9 billion for affordable housing (as called for in the Ontario Alternative Budget 2007.)
- Public social housing, not private

## 2). **RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE TO \$10 NOW!**

86 Ontario economists say “There is a common, but incorrect, assumption that higher minimum wages destroy low-wage jobs and increase unemployment among those they are most intended to help.” In the US, over 650 economists (including 5 Nobel Laureates) supported raising the minimum wage, calling it “an important tool in fighting poverty”. ACORN is calling on the Province to:

- Boost the Ontario economy by raising the minimum wage to \$10 *before* the next election.
- Tie the minimum wage to inflation so that it continues to increase automatically.

## 3). **REGULATE THE PAYDAY LENDING INDUSTRY**

Even the Canadian Payday Loan Association recognizes that there are many companies in the industry, which engage in unscrupulous practices. It is time to reign in the Payday Lending industry. In addition to the maximum interest rate, the Province should:

- Set a maximum interest rate of 60%
- make it mandatory for payday lenders to acquire licenses, prohibits rollover loans, wage-tied loans, and loan "insurance" requirements such as providing post-dated cheques.
- Expand the availability of credit counseling services.
- Enshrine borrower's rights and clearly define lender's legal obligations.

**4). ADDICTION SERVICES**

Addictions and Mental Health Problems are now the leading cause of absenteeism in the workplace, while remaining the lowest funded department of the Ministry of Health, destroying families and communities.

- The Ontario Government must address the deterioration of Addictions Services over the last 15 years caused by a 12 year funding freeze and inadequate funding increases.
- An increased funding of no less than \$200 Million is required to restore these services due to 15 years of inflation and increased demand.

**5). POISON PAINT (LEAD HAZARD REDUCTION ACTIVITIES)**

The collective loss of 5 IQ points due to environmental exposure to neurotoxins such as lead costs Canadians \$30 billion per year. Lead paint is the real brain drain in Ontario.

- The provincial health department needs identify at risk communities and devise an outreach, remediation and prevention strategy to address lead poisoning in young children from paint. This would include funding for pilot studies in “high risk” communities – areas with high percentage of pre-1960 dwellings (more than 25%).
- The Ministry of Colleges, training and Universities needs to develop a certification training program for “lead safe” practices. Develop standards, regulations, and compliance mechanisms through lead inspections, enforcement, workshops, seminars, and public education. Enact protective disclosure/ right-to-know legislation to ensure that lead paint information for buyers, sellers, and tenants is transparent.
- The Province should divest any Sherwin-Williams stock from provincial pension funds until the company adequately addresses their company’s abuses of the environment.
- The Province should meet with community organizations to discuss effective ways to implement lead hazard reduction activities and hold public hearings on this issue.

**6). IMMIGRANT RIGHTS**

Up to 200 000 people live and work in Canada without legal status, access to education, health care, or the ability to vote. According to the Conference Board of Canada, the failure to recognize international credentials costs the economy \$1 billion a year.

- Recognize international credentials, skills and experiences so that new Canadians can find employment in their professions and trades.
- Recognition and affirmation of the status and rights of Ontario residents without citizenship / legal status.

**7). COMMUNITY RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACE - SCHOOLS**

As community space, schools in Ontario are recognized as hubs for community activity and need be affordable and accessible to communities. ACORN is calling for:

- Removal of cost and procedural barriers for community use of school space so that people can access the public space their taxes have already paid for.

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