

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Raising Ontarians out of poverty

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Last week, the province released its 2016 Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Report, which highlights progress made by the province in lifting people out of poverty.

The 2014-2019 Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential, aims to create a province where every person has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential and contribute to a prosperous and healthy Ontario.

This report doesn't just deliver good news for the province but also for the residents here in our riding of Newmarket-Aurora. In the time since I was appointed Ontario's Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, one thing has become abundantly clear: Ontario's best resource is its people and our potential is limitless.

The initial Poverty Reduction Strategy was launched in 2008 with that same spirit of inclusion, support for our people and commitment to strengthening our communities. Nearly a decade into this important work, we have remained committed to setting targets, building on what works, sharing our progress and fostering partnerships across and beyond government that will help Ontarians leave poverty behind.

Few things expand opportunity for a family like being able to afford everyday life.

When we're able to shift our focus from just getting by to finally getting ahead, the future we dream for ourselves and for our families becomes a whole lot brighter. As we look towards to the future, we know our work is far from done. We continue to take on new challenges with the same grit, determination and boldness that defined our first Poverty Reduction Strategy nearly a decade ago. As we move forward, we will build on the results collected in this report and continue our relentless pursuit of our targets so that every Ontarian has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Expanding Rent Controls

It's unacceptable that so many Ontarians are faced with housing costs that are rising dramatically.

Families on tight budgets are feeling the pinch of a rental market that is struggling to keep up with demand.

I have heard the concerns from families and individuals all across our riding and the province. The province will soon unveil new rental controls to address the skyrocketing cost to rent a home. It's all part of an ongoing review of the Residential Tenancies Act.

We are working with municipal partners to make secondary suites - self-contained residential units that already exist in many homes - available quickly, helping communities better respond to renters' needs.

In addition to the coming, expanded, rent controls, Ontario has set the guideline for rental increases on current rent controlled buildings at 1.5 per cent. The rent increase guideline is the maximum most landlords can raise a tenant's rent without the approval of the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I know there's more we need to do. In the days ahead, we'll share more details about a transformative plan that will allow Ontarians, no matter their budget or community, to realize their dream of having an affordable place to call home.

Premier's Tour

Last week I had the pleasure of taking Premier Kathleen Wynne on a tour of the great riding of Newmarket-Aurora. We stopped at several locations to meet residents and to showcase the amazing work being done in our community.

Our first stop was the Aurora Seniors' Centre, where the Premier was warmly received (and bumped into her Grade Two teacher, now an Aurora resident). We were able to chat with seniors, learn about the woodshop, learn about the centre's computer room and shoot billiards. The seniors' center offers many activities and grows busier each year.

We visited Dairy Quality in Newmarket and met with the research and development team. It was fascinating to observe the Dairy Quality system. Their mobile testing device uses a smart phone and an application to test raw milk for white blood cells ? without the need to send out samples for analysis. The innovative systems save farmers money and help improve the health of the dairy herd. Dairy Quality recently won the Province of Ontario's top agricultural innovation award for its technology.

Our final stop of the day was in Newmarket to visit Treefrog. Treefrog is a digital marketing agency with a strategic and integrated approach to web-design and online marketing. It is truly inspiring to look around and see such an interesting, bright, and very ?green? space! The Premier and I toured the Social and SEO team department, the Design Team Space and the App Development Space. It was amazing to see their on-going work and the new app developments that are currently produced.

Treefrog Owner Sean Stephens graciously offered to host an "Innovation in Newmarket-Aurora" roundtable. Together with the Premier, we participated with members of the Newmarket-Aurora business community in fulsome roundtable discussions. This was an excellent opportunity to not only celebrate local business, but to discuss future endeavors and the participation of government and business.

New GO Station on Bloomington

On Friday, I dug in, turned the dirt and helped launch the building of a new GO Train Station at Bloomington Road and Highway 404. This modern station on the Richmond Hill line will provide both train and bus service and close to 1,000 parking spots. This new GO Station will help commuters living in Aurora by giving them increased access to GO Transit service. I expect the station to be operational in early 2018.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.