



Durham Community Legal Clinic
& Access to Justice Hub

Written Submissions to:

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Standing Committee
on Social Policy
of the
Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

Oct. 22, 2020

Re: Bill 202, *Soldiers'
Aid Commission Act,
2020*

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About

The **Durham Community Legal Clinic (DCLC)** is a Community Legal Clinic that provides legal services, information, education, and representation for historically marginalized and low-income residents of Durham Region. DCLC also engages in advocacy and law reform activities, in particular to ensure that our laws properly consider the perspectives of historically marginalized and low-income Ontarians. The main areas of services DCLC provides includes employment law and related services, housing and tenancy issues, and social benefits.

The **Durham Access to Justice Hub®** (the “Hub”) was established by the clinic in 2019 with the assistance of LAO. This inter-agency and inter-disciplinary initiative intended to provide legal services beyond the income thresholds and subject matter of LAO, and other social, financial, and psychological services. These cooperative relationships seek to foster better client-centered services, reduce administrative barriers and silos, and improve efficiency of services that are funded or subsidized by taxpayer dollars. Some techniques used to achieve these goals include recruitment of volunteers to contribute towards improving access to justice, and by embedding students into workflows and innovative projects through experiential education. Through the Hub, DCLC provides even broader services to focus on the root causes of poverty, and engages in deeper forms of poverty alleviation. DCLC recognizes that veteran status is a particular vulnerability that can give rise to poverty, and may require special interventions and supports.

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Introduction

1. The Soldiers' Aid Commission (the "Commission") was first established by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario through an Order in Council, on Nov. 10, 1915, to assist WWI veterans and their families with reintegration into society, especially with finding work and affordable housing. In this way, the Commission was one of the first significant commitment that Ontario undertook to build and develop a social support network.
2. Bill 202, which recognizes the sacrifices made by our nation's veterans, and the crucial role they have played in maintaining democracy and peace in Canada, and around the globe. We hope to speak to this proposed legislation with particular consideration for access to justice, the rule of law, and the considerations of poverty law in Ontario.
3. The Commission's purpose at the time of creation was, "To take care of and to find employment for members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force who return to Canada during the period of the War, and to assist, advise and co-operate with The Military Hospitals Commission, and with all Provincial or local committees or organizations to attain the aforesaid objects, and to do all things which may be incidental and ancillary to the foregoing."¹ This is a noble mandate, which has continued largely unchanged to this day.
4. While its core purpose remains largely the same, the Commission has continued to expand its reach and mandate. In 1920 the Commission received all the powers of a Children's Aid Society,

¹ J. de L. Taché, "Returned Soldiers: Proceedings of the Special Committee Appointed to Consider, Inquire Into and Report Upon the Reception, Treatment, Care, Training and Re-education of the Wounded, Disabled and Convalescent who Have Served in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, and the Provision of Employment for Those who Have Been Honourably Discharged who are Unable to Engage in Their Former Occupation. Comprising the Evidence Taken and Statements Submitted in Connection Therewith," 1917, House of Commons. Special Committee on Returned Soldiers, at 647, available at: <<https://books.google.ca/books?id=-ws2AQAAMAAJ&dq>>; See also, *Soldiers' Aid Commission Act Ontario, 1960 c 377*, available at: <<https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3097&context=rso>>.

to serve as a Crown Card to over 600 children,² and was further expanded in the period after the Second World War and the Korean War to provide support to veterans of those conflicts as well.³

5. Among its many accomplishments, we submit that the Commission should also be remembered for the way in which it has brought the importance of social benefits and societal welfare to the forefront in Ontario, and helped open the door to provide basic social benefits and protections to all Ontarians. Examples of this can be found throughout the Commission's history from the Ontario *Workers Compensation Act*, Canada's first piece of social policy legislation in 1915, to The Veterans Welfare Fund in 1930, and the Commissions role as a part of the department of Public Welfare In Ontario. This is a powerful history, which helped reduce the stigma around social assistance.⁴ We hope this new legislation will empower the Commission to continue.
6. Despite these myriad accomplishments, the current legislation it is not without its limitations. This proposed bill would represent the first time since 1970 that the act has been updated, and the Commission has recently come under fire for failing to provide supports to veterans who have served Canada in recent conflicts beyond WWI and the Korean War.
7. We believe that the proposed legislation, which would allow the Commission to expand its services to all of Ontario's veterans, is long overdue. We applaud these changes as looking towards new realities in Ontario, with approximately 3,850 service members leaving the Canadian Armed Forces each year to live or work in Ontario.⁵

² James A. Onusko, "Ontario's Soldiers' Aid Commission: 100 Years of Assistance to Veterans in Need 1915-2015," *Soldiers' Aid Commission*, 2015, at 23, available at:

<<https://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcass/community/OntariosSoldiersAidCommission.pdf>>.

³ *Ibid* at 41.

⁴ *Ibid* at viii, 60.

⁵ The Review, "Ontario introduces legislation to provide support for more Ontario veterans and their families," Sept. 18, 2020, available at: <<https://thereview.ca/2020/09/18/ontario-introduces-legislation-to-provide-support-for-more-ontario-veterans-and-their-families/>>.

8. Having a framework in place to ensure we are able to protect those who have spent their best years protecting us is absolutely crucial. The support provided by the Commission is particularly important because its mandate is fulfilled “with very little public fanfare and with limited expense to Ontarians.”⁶
9. We applaud the improved outcomes that this legislation will make possible for the 5% of homeless persons who are veterans, yet it would be remiss of us to forget the 95% who are not, and who struggle daily to pull themselves from poverty without the help of organizations such as the Commission. We ask today that they are not forgotten, a sentiment which we believe would be echoed by the commission itself, and all those who work towards the alleviation of poverty in our nation.
10. We would also like to recognize that in addition to their sacrifices overseas and within our borders, it was our veterans who indirectly lead the charge towards basic social reforms, benefits, and supports for all those living in Ontario and Canada. We would ask now that this government commit to building an Ontario that recognizes that the supports such as those in Bill 202 are crucial for all Ontarians.

Background

11. The Commission had its earlier precedents in Upper Canada in various statutes that were specifically intended to assist the poor.¹⁶ Even during these early times, what would become

⁶ Onusko, *supra* note 2, at xi.

¹⁶ Earlier examples can be found in the common law, for example, the *Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834* (U.K.), c. 76, but it’s unlikely that this had much bearing in Canada (*McKenzie v. McKenzie*, 1970 CanLII 782 (BC CA) at 303-304, 311-312; *McMaster (Re)*, 1947 CanLII 134 (SK QB)). Earlier examples can include the *Poor Relief Act, 1601*, 43 Eliz., ch. 2, which set up workhouses in England for those who had no means of maintaining themselves (*Creery v. Creery (Re)*, 1960 CanLII 610 (BC SC) at 621). This approach was not necessarily adopted across what is now Canada, but in Ontario the Toronto House of Industry was established in an unused courthouse in 1837, specifically as an alternative to workhouses used in England and in reaction to the *House of Industry Act of 1837*, Statutes of Upper Canada (1837), 7 William IV, c. 24 (Russell C Smandych, “Colonial Welfare Laws and Practices: Coping without an English Poor Law in Upper Canada, 1792-1837,” *Manitoba Law Journal* 23:214, at 241, available at: <<http://www.canlii.org/t/sgcz>>). The divisions over how to address the issues of poverty manifested themselves over highly partisan lines, even at that time prior to Confederation (*ibid*, at 242).

Ontario had special programs for those who would volunteer for military service. The Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada was founded in December 1812 by prominent citizens in what is now Toronto, to provide provisions and aid to soldiers and their families, with the explicit goal of poverty alleviation.¹⁷

12. Even in the early days of Confederation, there was a widespread understanding of the need for governmental intervention to address poverty. The *House of Refuge Act, 1890* sought to implement province-wide systems to address poverty, which experienced rapid expansion and evolution until 1911.¹⁸
13. On June 30, 1915, Canada established the Military Hospitals Commission, which extended into a national network of veteran hospitals. A new Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment was created on Feb. 21, 1918, transferring much of these medical facilities, and shifting a focus to rehabilitation. With this shift was a recognition that that transitional assistance required more than just medical services, and included vocational services and income security benefits as well.¹⁹
14. These rudimentary programs were not truly effective until after the Great Depression, where William Lyon Mackenzie King introduced a number of reforms. His intent, as declared on Oct.

¹⁷ Smandych, *ibid*, at 234.

¹⁸ This act was preceded by an act of Upper Canada in 1810 to allow the poor to be kept in "the common goal" until they could be placed in a "house of correction," but it was not really until 1890 that every county in Ontario acknowledged the responsibility to address poverty. Implementation of these programs continued to be thwarted by moralistic views of poverty, and an erroneous assumption that poverty was strictly an urban issue confined to Toronto (See Deborah Carter Park, David J. Wood, "Poor Relief and the County House of Refuge System in Ontario, 1880–1911." *Journal of historical geography* 18:4 (1992) at 440-441; Tracey Tyler, "When 'poorhouse' wasn't only an expression," *Toronto Star*, Jan. 3, 2009, available at: <https://www.thestar.com/news/2009/01/03/when_poorhouse_wasnt_only_an_expression.html>). The extent to which this created a duty or a liability on a municipality appears to be historically disputed in law (*Humphreys v. The City of London*, 1934 CanLII 162 (ON SC); see *contra County of Carleton v. City of Ottawa*, 1963 CanLII 214 (ONSC); 1964 CanLII 226 (rev'd ONCA)).

¹⁹ Veteran Affairs Canada, "Honouring Canada's Commitment: Opportunity with Security for Canadian Forces, Veterans and the Families in the 21st Century," Canadian Forces Advisory Council, March 2004, at 4, available at: <<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/public/pages/forces/nvc/reference.pdf>>.

14, 1935, was to banish from the land “poverty and adversity, want and misery.”²⁰ The history of transition after WWI, especially for veterans, played a crucial backdrop for these programs.²¹

15. The enactment of Privy Council order 7633 on Oct. 1, 1941 expanded significantly the benefits previously offered to veterans, and included comprehensive long-term programs.²² The success of the Veterans Charter was premised on the recognition that opportunities arose not simply from providing veterans a job, but by providing self-help, informed counselling, governmental assistance, voluntary effort, and business cooperation, all to help create opportunities.²³

16. The programs which followed were not without their problems. A representative plaintiff in a class action over funds administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). The Supreme Court of Canada concluded in *Authorson v. Canada (Attorney General)*²⁴ that s. 5.1(4) of the Department of Veterans Affairs Act²⁵ allowed for Parliament to expropriate property, and the *Canadian Bill of Rights*²⁶ and *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*²⁷ did not protect against these actions. However, the courts in this action ultimately did award veterans \$4.6 billion.²⁸

The Commission Today

17. The Commission continued to provide services and benefits to veterans, even with the expansion of services at the federal level. The current legislative authority for the Commission is derived from the *Soldiers' Aid Commission Act*²⁹ and *The Soldiers' Aid Commission Amendment Act, 1970*.³⁰

²⁰ Raymond B. Blake, *From Rights to Needs: A History of Family Allowances in Canada, 1929-92*, (2009) UBC Press, at 33.

²¹ Blake, *ibid*, at 35-36.

²² Veteran Affairs Canada, *supra* note 19 at 10.

²³ *Ibid* at 13.

²⁴ 2003 SCC 39 (CanLII), [2003] 2 SCR 40.

²⁵ RSC 1985, c V-1.

²⁶ SC 1960, c 44.

²⁷ *The Constitution Act, 1982*, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11.

²⁸ *Authorson v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2007 ONCA 501 (CanLII).

²⁹ RSO 1960, c 377, as amended by SO 1970, c 83.

³⁰ RSO 1970, c 83.

18. Funds provided by the Commission can be used for the following purposes:³¹

- a. **health-related items**, like hearing aids, glasses, prescription drugs and dental needs
- b. **home-related items**, like rent, repairs, moving costs, furniture, repair or replacement of roof and furnace
- c. **specialized equipment**, like assistive devices, wheelchairs and prosthetics
- d. **personal items**, like clothing and specialized support services

19. The administration of these services is provided by the Community and Developmental Services Division of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, by providing minor disbursement assistance (up to \$300) or major disbursement assistance (up to \$1,500). The Commission may provide up to \$2,000 to any single applicant over a 1-year period. The total assistance provided to veterans in 2015-2016, on the 100th anniversary of the Commission, was \$157,581.68.³²

20. Following the centenary of the Commission, an additional \$100,000 was provided, for a total of \$253,200. During 2016-2017, the Commission received financial assistance requests from 84 applicants, with 78 approved, for a total of \$88,944.76. There was a drop in applications from 134 from the previous year.³³

21. Applications to the Commission continued to drop in the following years. A major reason for this is the eligibility of veterans for services from the Commission. There are approximately 20,200 WWII and Korean War veterans in Ontario, all of them over the age of 80.³⁴ Other veterans remain ineligible.

³¹ Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, "Soldiers' Aid Commission," Government of Ontario, available at: <<https://www.ontario.ca/page/soldiers-aid-commission>>.

³² Hon. Helena Jaczek, "Annual Report Of The Soldiers' Aid Commission 2015-2016," Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, available at: <https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/open/sac/201516_AnnualReport.aspx>.

³³ Hon. Helena Jaczek, "Business Plan Of The Soldiers' Aid Commission 2017 - 2018," Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, available at: <https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/open/sac/201718_BusinessPlan.aspx>.

³⁴ Hon. Lisa MacLeod, "Business Plan Of The Soldiers' Aid Commission," Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, available at: <https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcsc/open/sac/201920_BusinessPlan.aspx>.

22. Bill 202, *Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020* (the “Act”) would expand the services provided by the Commission, beyond what veterans from WWII and the Korean War and their families. One of the main reasons for the drop in applications is the lack of eligible veterans, with younger veterans being excluded from eligibility.³⁵
23. The mandate could have been expanded by updating the existing governance documents,³⁶ or through regulation under s. 11(a) of the new Act. An Agency Mandate Review was conducted in 2015, as part of a province-wide review of all government agencies and boards, and an expansion of the mandate in this way was contemplated at that time. The new MOU signed on November 29, 2016, and again in January 2019, but did not expand the mandate.
24. Despite the support provided to veterans in Ontario through the Commission, veterans continuously indicate that these services are simply not enough. Additionally, the cuts imposed on other social services across the sector have left most veterans in Ontario with less than what they had previously, even when accounting for any supports through the Commission.
25. DCLC supports expanding the mandate of the Commission to support younger veterans. However, the younger veterans that DCLC serves widely indicate that other social supports and assistance are required, and even this expanded mandate will not be sufficient for their needs.

The Plight of Veterans in Ontario Today

26. Veterans remain a largely under-studied population in Ontario. The information we do have about Canadian veterans remains limited, with more precise details around racialized veterans remaining obscure.³⁷

³⁵ Patrick Cain, “Ontario’s veterans’ fund turns younger vets away, returns money to government unspent,” Global News, March 25, 2019, available at: <<https://globalnews.ca/news/4939075/ontario-soldiers-aid-commission/>>.

³⁶ “Memorandum of Understanding between the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Chair of the Soldiers’ Aid Commission,” s. 3.0, available at: <https://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/documents/en/mcsc/open/SAC_MOU_2011_en.pdf>.

³⁷ Ray et al., “The Experience of Homelessness Among Veterans,” Homeless Hub, 2011, at 2, available at: <<https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Homeless%20Vets%20Article.pdf>>.

27. There are approximately 650,000 veterans in Canada today.³⁸ Well over a third of them live in Ontario.³⁹ Approximately 3-5,000 veterans in Canada are homeless, which is about 4.06-7.7% of all veterans.⁴⁰ An estimated less than 1% of all Canadians are homeless,⁴¹ demonstrating the disproportionate rate of homelessness among veterans.⁴²
28. Veteran use of shelters is considered “episodically homeless,” defined as three or more episodes during a year, but are roughly the same as non-veterans for chronic homelessness, defined as 180 or more nights in a year.⁴³ This may suggest that veteran homelessness can be differentiated from non-veteran homelessness in this way, and may even be more susceptible to effective social interventions.
29. The best supports that Canadian veterans current report are shelters, and services provided Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), especially as it relates to detox and drug and alcohol abuse follow-up.⁴⁴ The lack of affordable housing is generally one of the worst issues that they face.

³⁸ Neil R. Ellis, “Moving Towards Ending Homelessness Among Veterans,” House of Commons, Report of the Standing Committee on Veteran Affairs, May 2019, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, available at: <<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/ACVA/Reports/RP10435401/acvarp12/acvarp12-e.pdf>>.

³⁹ There are an estimated 232,200 veterans in Ontario out of 639,900 in Canada (Veteran Affairs Canada, “Facts and Figures,” December 2019, at 12, available at: <<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/pdf/about-vac/news-media/facts-figures/facts-and-figures-dec2019-01.pdf>>). Although homelessness is unlikely to be spread strictly proportionately across Canada, it is worth noting the disproportionate numbers that reside in Ontario.

⁴⁰ Ellis, *supra* note 38 at 4.

⁴¹ Stephen Gaetz et al., “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016,” *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press*, 2016, at 12, available at: <https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC16_final_20Oct2016.pdf>; Statistics Canada, “Population and Dwelling Count Highlight Tables, 2016 Census,” Feb. 20, 2019, available at: <<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/pd-pl/Table.cfm?Lang=Eng&T=101&S=50&O=A>>. However, these numbers are probably still an underestimation of homelessness generally, and is likely to get worse during the pandemic; Ben Cousins, “Canada's rate of homelessness may be higher than reported: Nanos survey,” CTVNews, Aug. 12, 2020, available at: <<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/canada-s-rate-of-homelessness-may-be-higher-than-reported-nanos-survey-1.5060801>>.

⁴² Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), “The Extent and Nature of Veteran Homelessness in Canada, March 2015, available at: <<http://www12.esdc.gc.ca/sgpe-pmps/servlet/sgpp-pmps-pub?lang=eng&curjsp=p.5bd.2t.1.3ls@-eng.jsp&curactn=dwnld&pid=46769&did=4552>>.

⁴³ ESDC, *ibid* at 5.

⁴⁴ Ray et al., *supra* note 37, at 13, 15, 19-20.

30. Despite the gender disparity in veterans, the use of shelters by veterans is roughly the same between both genders.⁴⁵ This suggests there is actually a disproportionate number of women among veterans who use shelter services.⁴⁶
31. Veteran issues around homelessness might be properly encompassed under the National Housing Strategy, launched in November 2017. This will likely require greater collaboration between the provincial and federal governments.⁴⁷
32. Alcoholism, other drug addictions, and mental health problems, are all major issues identified by veterans as problems that lead to homelessness, years after their discharge. One of the main factors for these issues is the transition to civilian life.⁴⁸
33. A significant factor related to transition may be the duration of the supports provided. Veterans often indicate that the period of time that they receive these services is inadequate.⁴⁹
34. While additional supports and services from the Commission would be welcome to veterans, it is clear from our experiences that this alone will not be enough to support the vast majority of veterans who need assistance.

Recommendations

35. The primary recommendation, and one that has been supported by all stakeholders, is expanding the eligibility of the Commission to include a broader definition of veterans, to allow for a larger segment of the veteran community to access these services. Ineligible veterans do apply to the Commission periodically, often knowing their claims will be rejected, simply to emphasize their exclusion from the current system.

⁴⁵ ESDC, *supra* note 42, at 4.

⁴⁶ Ellis, *supra* note 38, at 7.

⁴⁷ Ellis, *ibid* at 19-21.

⁴⁸ Ray et al., *supra* note 37, at 10-11, 15-16.

⁴⁹ Carolyn Thomas, "Many veterans face low-income levels, poverty after service," Windsor Star, July 15, 2014, available at: <<https://windsorstar.com/news/many-veterans-face-low-income-levels-poverty-after-service>>.

36. The expansion of the Commission's mandate should be accompanied by communication to Legions across Ontario, in an effort to help inform at-need veterans of the new services that might be available to them. This can be achieved in a cost-effective manner by working with partners who serve veterans, and without a major marketing campaign.
37. Of particular concern would be the treatment of any funds received by veterans through the Commission for any other social assistance they may receive. This might be properly defined in the regulations, but may also require clarification in any communications from the Ministry.
38. The importance of ensuring that recipients properly understand how funds received through this program are treated for the purposes of other social assistance they are receiving can be illustrated by looking at the implementation of the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) in Ontario. Out of necessity, the CERB was launched quickly, and many ODSP recipients were not made aware that CERB would be treated similar to employment earnings for income purposes which could lead to benefit claw-backs.
39. Ontarians in receipt of ODSP were already facing a considerable struggle to support themselves and their families. With the assessment of CERB as employment earnings, many of these Ontarians suddenly found themselves with a significantly reduced income than they had budgeted for. This left them facing an increased risk of eviction, and in many cases exacerbated pre-existing mental health conditions. By failing to provide clarity as to how CERB funds would be treated, Ontario placed an additional burden on some of the most vulnerable residents within their care. This is a situation the DCLC does not wish to see repeated with Bill 202 for veterans.
40. Finally, Bill 202 might be more effective if it explicitly makes further reference to poverty alleviation, preventing homelessness, and providing assistance to at-risk veterans. Just as the Commission was effective in spurring other changes in Ontario at the time, the hope

would be that Bill 202 would signal the need for more integrated supports, and a recognition that assistance to low-income Ontarians generally will invariably assist veterans who are struggling.

Conclusions

41. Early support for veterans, especially after the two world wars, were instrumental in assisting all Ontarians in recognizing the need for governmental intervention in poverty alleviation. Moralistic and judgemental stereotypes around poverty that preceded these times were easily dismissed in light of the sacrifice that veterans made on behalf of their country, and their province.
42. However, in the modern era we have a better understanding that the plight of veterans is also deeply connected to the plight of all Ontarians, especially those who are most at risk. Because many veterans today continue to struggle with homelessness, alcoholism and drug abuse, and mental health disorders, they rely heavily on the social support system that protects the entire population.
43. The plight of veterans has been politically effective in Canada in helping Ontarians understand the need for social supports, because we recognize the sacrifices they make, and potentially the traumas they endure, as a result of their service. The law has also made enormous progress in recognizing the role of trauma for other vulnerable populations, for example, those struggling with drug addiction. Many of these individuals also have a history of stress, trauma, physical or sexual abuse, parental neglect, or other social determinants.⁵⁰ Properly understanding the role of trauma in the lives of Ontarians helps inform the need for a strong and robust social support system.

⁵⁰ *PHS Community Services Society v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2008 BCSC 661 at para 53; 2010 BCCA 15 at para 70; 2011 SCC 44 (CanLII), [2011] 3 SCR 134 at para 7. See also, Supreme Court of Canada, “Factum of the Respondents, PHS Community Services Society, Dean Edward Wilson and Shelly Tomic,” Factums on Appeal, at paras 6-7, 18, available at: <https://www.scc-csc.ca/WebDocuments-DocumentsWeb/33556/FM030_Respondents_PHS-Community-Services-Society-et-al.pdf>.

44. We have also made enormous strides today in moving away from the moralistic and judgemental approaches towards those living in poverty generally. This will be particularly important in the financial aftermath of the pandemic, which will leave many Ontarians, veterans and non-veterans alike, in difficult economic circumstances through no fault of their own.
45. DCLC supports Bill 202, and the expansion of the mandate of the Commission to include younger veterans. However, our experiences with veterans, and with those struggling with financial circumstances generally, confirm that this change alone will be insufficient to assist our veterans. Instead, widespread and robust improvements to our entire social support system is needed. This will assist all Ontarians, including veterans, and strengthen our economy and our society.
46. The cuts to social assistance services on Oct. 1, 1995 had a devastating effect on Ontarians, cutting Ontario Works (OW) rates by 21.6%. Since that time, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by 56%, with groceries rising at a rate higher than inflation, at 97% over 25 years. The monthly rate for OW in 2020 is \$79 lower per month than it was in 1995. When combined with the increased costs of rental housing, the situation following the pandemic will be dire indeed.⁵¹ Given the particular vulnerabilities of veterans, these impacts will be even worse for them.
47. Veterans play a crucial role in symbolically demonstrating what we strive to achieve for in our society. These goals were never just about freedom and the maintenance of a democratic society, but were always also about fostering and creating a more inclusive society, and one where our government makes a deliberate and concerted effort to assist those most at need. This is also how we support our veterans, and how we honour them the most.

⁵¹ John Stapleton, "The 'Welfare Diet' Turns 25: The growing nutrition crisis in the COVID19 recession," Open Policy, October 2020, available at: <https://openpolicyontario.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/10/The-Welfare-Diet-turns-25_R9.pdf>.