



# Put Food in the Budget

A POOR PEOPLE'S INQUIRY, FALL 2013

## Is social justice really Premier Wynne's top priority?

Premier Kathleen Wynne told the media that social justice is her top priority. But 400,000 people use food banks every month in Ontario.

Premier Wynne's claim is believable only if she significantly increases social assistance rates and puts food in the budget of people who are poor in Ontario.

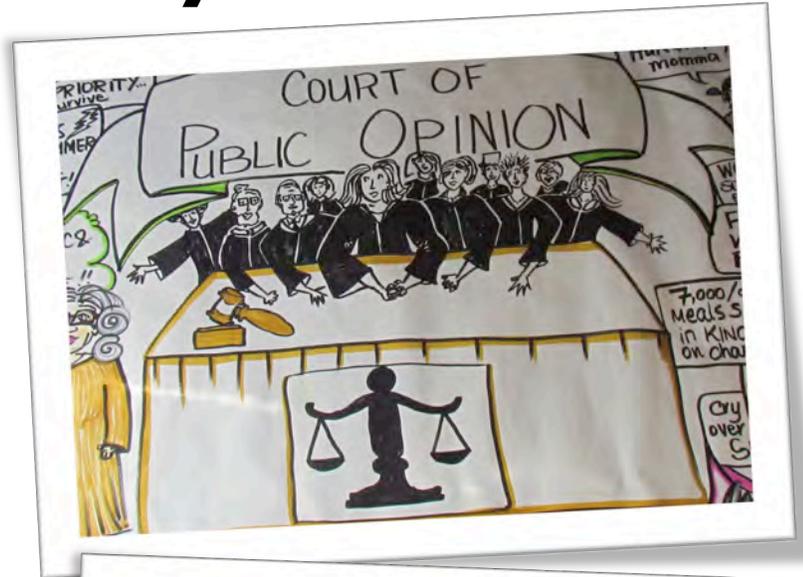
### A Poor People's Inquiry

The Put Food in the Budget campaign will conduct A Poor People's Inquiry to answer the following question:

*Do the changes to social assistance introduced by Premier Wynne put food in the budget of people who are poor in Ontario?*

A Poor People's Inquiry will gather evidence from people who receive social assistance, and from people who volunteer and work in organizations that serve, support or advocate with people who are poor. Hearings will be held across Ontario.

*NOTE: The illustrations featured in this newsletter are snapshots from a graphic recording of the hearing held during PFIB's Annual Campaign Meeting on September 27 in Toronto; all images courtesy of Tanya Gerber; [tanyagerber.com](http://tanyagerber.com).*



### YOU BE THE JURY!

Everyone who provides testimony and everyone who attends a hearing is eligible to be a member of the 'jury' deliberating on the question *Do the changes to social assistance introduced by Premier Wynne put food in the budget of people who are poor in Ontario?*

INSIDE: Learn how to get involved with A Poor People's Inquiry in your community.

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## Background: Why A Poor People's Inquiry?

Why is the Put Food in the Budget campaign organizing A Poor People's Inquiry into Premier Wynne's commitment to be the social justice premier?

### Why does a single person in Ontario receive only \$626 a month in social assistance?

After paying the rent, many people in Ontario don't have enough money to buy food. More than 400,000 people in our wealthy province are forced to go to food banks every month.

People who are poor, and their advocates and allies, have participated in good faith in government consultations and made hundreds of submissions to the government's Commission to Review Social Assistance. Thousands of people and hundreds of organizations have clearly said that social assistance rates are too low to put food in the budget.

### Facts and stories are not enough.

All the facts and the personal stories presented to the Liberal government have not convinced it to raise rates to levels that put food in the budget. Why not?

The answer is that ending poverty in Ontario is not yet a big enough political problem for the Wynne government.

The government cancelled the construction of gas-fired power plants in Oakville and Mississauga out of fear that Liberals would lose votes and seats – and even lose power – if they didn't. They cancelled the gas

plants without caring about the cost.

This shows that when an issue becomes so important to the public that it may have a heavy political cost, the government will respond.

Accordingly, people who hold social justice as a top priority must work together to make poverty reduction a demand that can't be ignored. Then social assistance rates will be raised to a level that everyone can *put food in the budget*.

### Premier Wynne's claim to be the social justice premier will be judged on her record.

Premier Wynne, who said that social justice was her top priority, has been the premier of Ontario for almost a year. She now has a record that can be evaluated:

- Premier Wynne introduced welfare reforms in her first budget.
- Premier Wynne has not restored the Community Start-Up & Maintenance Benefit.

Premier Wynne will soon announce her plans for the next five years of her government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, and is preparing the next Ontario budget for the spring of 2014. If Premier Wynne fails to increase social assistance rates to a level that puts food in the budget, then she fails in her promise to be the social justice premier of Ontario.





# A Poor People's Inquiry



**SUBMIT YOUR EVIDENCE!**

There are three ways to make submissions to A Poor People's Inquiry:

1. Submit your own evidence on our website at [putfoodinthebudget.ca](http://putfoodinthebudget.ca).
2. Gather evidence from people you know and submit online or by mail to: A Poor People's Inquiry/PFIB, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, 955 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M4M 3P3.
3. Submit evidence to a hearing in your community (visit our website at [putfoodinthebudget.ca](http://putfoodinthebudget.ca) for a list of community hearings).

To organize a hearing in your community, visit our website and download the *Organizer's Guide*.

## Inquiry Format

### Community Panels

In the first week of December – the fifth anniversary of the Liberal government's five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy – hearings will be held in communities across Ontario. At each community hearing, a panel of people who are poor will preside. Evidence gathered will be collected into an Official Record of Evidence.

### Public Testimony

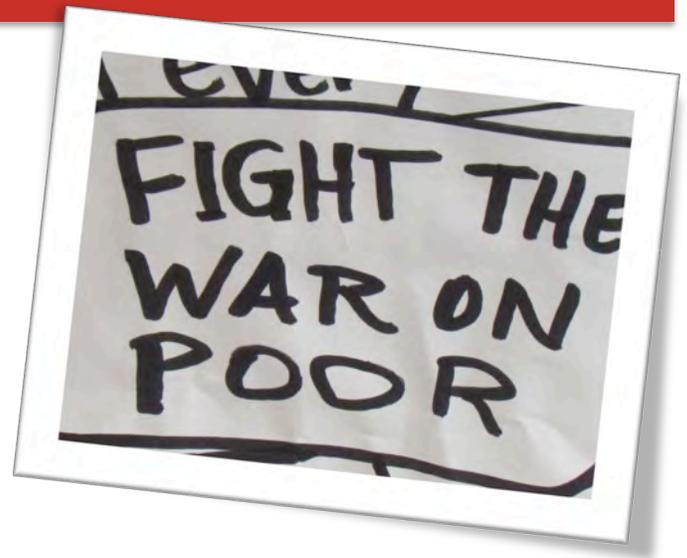
- People who are poor will testify from their experience on whether Premier Wynne's reforms have put food in their budget.
- People who volunteer and work in organizations that serve, support or advocate with people who are poor will testify from their experience on whether Premier Wynne's reforms have put food in the budget of people who are poor in Ontario.
- Members of the community can attend and listen to the evidence.

### Indictment Option

If a majority of people in the community hearing juries vote NO, the Put Food in the Budget campaign will indict Premier Wynne in the Court of Public Opinion. The indictment will charge Premier Wynne *with knowingly misleading the public about her priorities in order to secure political advantage for herself, her government, and other interests that gain from continued poverty in Ontario.*

### Committal to Trial in the Court of Public Opinion

Trials will then be organized in communities across Ontario. The Official Record of Evidence will be used to create trial documents. Liberal MPPs will be subpoenaed to testify at the community trials, where they will be subject to cross-examination.





## How do we make poverty a political problem for the Liberal government of Premier Wynne?

**We are winning the argument.....** The Commission to Review Social Assistance in Ontario recommended an immediate increase of \$100 a month to the base rate of Ontario Works.

**..... But we have not yet won the fight.** Premier Wynne says that addressing poverty is a complex issue and she must act with caution. However, the Liberal government didn't move cautiously when it cancelled the construction of the gas-fired power plants.

A majority of people say income inequality is a major social problem and support an increase in taxes to increase social programs. Ontarians who support urgent action on poverty should use this public support to hold Premier Wynne accountable to her pledge to be the 'the social justice premier.' We must demand that she raise social assistance rates so that people who are poor in Ontario can *put food in the budget*.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. Why does A Poor People's Inquiry focus only on Premier Wynne? Isn't the whole government responsible?**

A. Kathleen Wynne said she wants to be the social justice premier. And she has been premier for almost a year.

**Q. Why focus on the Liberals? Why not take on the other political parties too?**

A. The government holds power. Premier Wynne and her Cabinet have the power to raise social assistance rates by themselves – they could make that decision tomorrow. If another party were in power, we would focus on that party.

**Q. Can the government afford to increase social assistance rates?**

A. Yes, for two reasons. First, the government can always find money when an issue becomes a political problem. For example, when gas-fired power plants became a political problem, the government spent hundreds of millions of dollars to cancel them.

Second, Ontario is a wealthy society. The widest gap in Canada between the richest and poorest people is in Ontario. Corporations and the wealthy can afford to pay more in taxes.

**Q. What test does Premier Wynne have to pass to prove that social justice is her top priority?**

A. The Put Food in the Budget campaign believes that Premier Wynne must raise social assistance rates so that people who are poor in Ontario have enough money to put food in the budget.

## CONNECT WITH THE CAMPAIGN

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