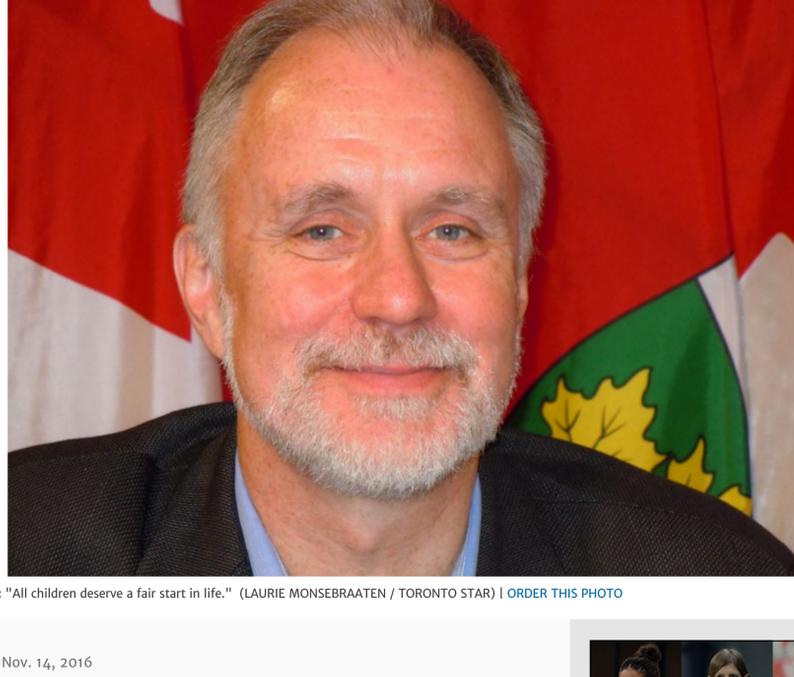


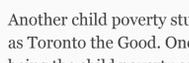
As the child poverty capital of the country, Toronto must invest in kids: Editorial.

A new report says 27 per cent of children in this city are impoverished.



Sean Meagher: "All children deserve a fair start in life." (LAURIE MONSEBRAATEN / TORONTO STAR) | ORDER THIS PHOTO

Mon., Nov. 14, 2016



Another child poverty study has struck yet another blow to this city's reputation as Toronto the Good. Once again, our city has earned the shameful distinction of being the child poverty capital of Canada.

The study, based on 2014 statistics (the most recent available) and written by a coalition of social agencies, describes an appalling reality: 27 per cent of children — or 133,000 — are living below the poverty line. In some neighbourhoods, such as Regent Park and Thorncliffe Park, more than half of the kids fall below the line.

These numbers predate the current city administration, but they should serve as an urgent reminder to council and Mayor John Tory that they mustn't wait any longer to act.

Last year, council, led by Tory, voted to pursue "TO Prosperity," the city's first comprehensive anti-poverty plan, which includes bold promises on access to transit, affordable housing, child care and the minimum wage.

But since then council has undermined the plan at every turn, starving it of the funds it needs to succeed. In the 2016 budget, only \$10 million was dedicated to the plan, much less than the \$75 million experts said was needed.

That's both shameful and short-sighted. Tackling child poverty is not only the moral thing to do, it also makes economic sense. Study after study has shown that it pays to invest in poverty reduction measures.

For instance, for every \$1 spent on affordable child care, an important part of the anti-poverty plan, governments receive more than \$2 in increased taxes from mothers' employment income. Meanwhile, a McMaster University study showed that providing more robust services to single mothers and their children quickly pays for itself by helping women get off social assistance.

Nor is the stark inequality in future living conditions and education associated with family income unavoidable. Rather, investing in subsidized early childhood education spaces, student nutrition programs and after-school programs can help poor children bridge the learning gap they face so they have the same opportunities to succeed as their better-off peers.

We know what must be done. What's lacking now is the will — and in municipal politics, will equals money. The anti-poverty program has so far been among the many casualties of the city's dire revenue shortage, which the mayor and his council have been so slow to address. While Tory promised to back new revenue tools this fall, the only one he has publicly endorsed so far is a relatively modest hotel tax.

Instead, he has asked for a 2.6-per-cent reduction in program spending across all departments, many of which have already been cut to the bone after six years of austerity. That leaves precious little room for anti-poverty programs.

The approval of the city's first comprehensive, long-term anti-poverty plan was a hopeful moment. But it won't mean much unless the city has the money to pay for it. This disturbing new study is just the latest reminder of the great human cost a lack of political courage can carry.

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