



Living Skies Regional Council

The United Church of Canada
in Saskatchewan



10 November 2021

Letter from the Living Skies Regional Council Executive to the government of Saskatchewan:
Great concern about impact of changes to social assistance

Dear Premier Scott Moe and Minister of Social Services, Hon. Lori Carr,

As people of faith, we are deeply concerned by the current Government's move to the Saskatchewan Income Support program and the traumatic effect it is having on those living in poverty throughout the province. At the heart of our faith story is the call to care for those who live at the margins of our communities, especially the poor. In Psalm 83, God speaks these words to the people: "Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute (the poor)." Time and again, we are called to not only care for the poor but to advocate for justice so that those who live below the poverty line in our communities might receive the support they need. When supported financially and socially, people thrive and when all people thrive, we move toward being a more just and equitable society.

The recent changes to the social assistance programs in the province do not reflect this. The ripple affects of the move to the Saskatchewan Income Support program spread wide and affect community members in urban and rural communities alike. Is it just to expect individuals to make \$860.00 a month cover not only rent and utilities, but also transportation, food, clothing, household and personal necessities? Is it just to claw back money given as gifts, or damage deposits returned when individuals can no longer afford paying rent? The people who rely on these services need leaders who are willing to look beyond the stereotypes that surround this community and see the humans at the heart of the situation. When the humanity of those who live in poverty is seen and honoured, conversation about strong responses to the issue of poverty in our province can be addressed with compassion and justice.

We, the Living Skies Regional Council Executive of the United Church of Canada, implore our government to hear the recommendations of the anti-poverty activists, of the social support networks and of the people themselves and consider addressing the following requests:

- Provide SIS recipients with full coverage of basic utilities
- Stop the clawback of the Saskatchewan Rental Supplement to SIS recipients
- Stop the clawback of damage deposits and small gifts of money.

- Provide SIS recipients with the option of having their rent and utility bills paid directly to landlords and utility providers.
- Raise the SIS rate by \$300/month as a first step toward raising it above the poverty line.
- Set income support rates based on the cost of living.

The cost of providing equitable living income to those who need it may seem high at the moment, but in the long run the cost to the health care system, the social services system, and the emergency response system will decrease as people rely less and less on these services and begin to live supported, sustainable, and independent lives. That is the just and equitable response needed right now, to allow people to live lives above the poverty line so that basic needs are met. The people of this province need to know that when it comes to a time of need, they will not have to decide between food, shelter and necessities each month. The people of this province need to know that their leaders believe in helping in ways that allow everyone the chance to flourish and contribute to the community that is Saskatchewan.

We look forward to your response, to livingskies@united-church.ca or to The Living Skies Regional Council Executive, 60a Athabasca St E, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 0L2.

Sincerely,

Rev. Tricia Gerhard, Regina, Chair of the Living Skies Regional Council Executive
Ron Brandow, Balcarres
Rev. Tim Ellis, Moose Jaw
Linda Gunningham, Regina
Rev. Dr. Kathleen James-Cavan, Saskatoon
Rev. Piotr Strzelecki, Kindersley
Rev. Dave Whalley, Big River