



REPORT TO: Co-Chairs and Members of
Public Health and Social Services Committee

SUBJECT: Appointing Niagara Region's Ontario Works Administrator

RECOMMENDATION

That this Committee recommends to Regional Council that:

1. Ms. Sarah Pennisi be reappointed as the Ontario Works Administrator for Niagara Region; and
2. This recommendation is sent to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Niagara Region delivers the Ontario Works program through Community Services - Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities.

The Ontario Works program was launched in 1997 with the enactment of the *Ontario Works Act*.

Section 47(3) of the *Act* states that the Minister of Community and Social Services delegates power or duty to the Ontario Works Director who may also delegate authority. This authority is delegated to local OW Administrators. Consequently, appointment of local Administrators must be approved by the Ministry of Community and Social Services - Ontario Works Director.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications directly associated with this report

PURPOSE

This report has been prepared to request Committee and Council approve the reappointment of Ms. Sarah Pennisi as the Ontario Works Administrator for the Niagara Region.

BACKGROUND

The Ontario Works program was launched in 1997 with the enactment of the *Ontario Works Act*. The *Act* establishes a program that:

- recognizes individual responsibility and promotes self-reliance through employment;
- provides financial assistance to those most in need while they meet obligations to become and stay employed;
- effectively serves people needing assistance; and
- is accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario.

In Niagara, the Ontario Works program is delivered by Community Services Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities. The MCSS established the following five principles that govern Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities' (SAEO) delivery, planning and implementation of services:

Principle 1

SAEO must provide a range of employment assistance activities with a focus on engaging participants in a collaborative process to identify and take steps that help participants attain sustainable employment. Service planning for the provision of employment assistance supports seamless and accessible service for participants through client-centred pathways to employment and integrated local planning.

Principle 2

SAEO must adopt approaches that support system integrity, and ensure decisions and resources are directed to participants based on the *Act*, regulations and policy directives concerning:

- eligibility for financial assistance; and
- eligibility for employment assistance and participation supports.

Principle 3

SAEO must evaluate services based on the quality of response and the speed of turnaround time related to:

- eligibility decisions;
- referrals to programs and services;
- acting on changes in participant circumstances; and
- the provision of information regarding available benefits and supports.

Principle 4

SAEO must base service delivery on a collaborative model that maximizes the use of cost-effective and expert resources within the community to streamline and rationalize services.

Principle 5

SAEO must review and evaluate service delivery based on outcomes for individuals and the organization, and align outcomes with the overall objectives of Ontario Works.

REPORT

The intent of the Ontario Works program is to help people in temporary financial need find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance through the provision of effective, integrated employment services and financial assistance.

In accordance with Section 47(3) of the *Act*, the Director may delegate a power or duty which has been imposed or conferred upon him/her to any other authorized person. The delegation of authority must be in writing and must set out limitations, restrictions, conditions and requirements. Delegation of this authority is to local Administrators who in turn may as prescribed in Section 44 of the *Act* delegate power and duty to others to carry out the obligations set in the *Act*. These obligations are to:

- provide employment assistance and financial assistance in accordance with legislative and regulatory authority, policy directives, and business practices;
- ensure all people residing in their geographic area have access to the application process;
- determine and monitor ongoing eligibility for employment assistance and financial assistance in accordance with legislative and regulatory authority, policy directives and business practices;
- provide a broad range of employment assistance activities and participation supports based on individual circumstances and employment needs;
- refer participants to employment assistance activities that reflect their individual skill, experience, circumstances and employment needs, as well as labour market realities;
- ensure participant involvement in a mutually responsive planning process that promotes self-reliance;
- help participants to increase their employability and achieve outcomes such as employment, employment retention, increased earnings and exits to employment through integrated service delivery planning that supports the provision of effective and timely employment services and supports;
- make determinations pertaining to the refusal, reduction or cancellation of assistance;
- provide a formal notice and review process for participants to address issues related to their eligibility;
- work with communities and organizations in the public, non-profit, and private sectors to be participating organizations;

- directly deliver and/or tender delivery of specific employment assistance activities, e.g. employment placement;
- administer funding in support of participation in Ontario Works;
- develop strategies for service provision and program management based on caseload demographics and the local labour market, as well as broader community human service plans;
- monitor contract compliance of participating organizations;
- manage front-line delivery issues;
- orient and train staff in the delivery of employment and financial assistance to ensure staff are able to implement services in a manner consistent with the intent of the program and the principles of delivery;
- fulfill data collection, reporting and audit requirements including accurate, comprehensive documentation to support eligibility decisions;
- make decisions regarding appropriate staffing configurations for the delivery of Ontario Works such that effective service goals and participant outcomes can be achieved;
- maintain supporting technology;
- seek the Director's approval where required, e.g. appointment of an Administrator (requests for approval should be addressed to the Director, Ontario Works and forwarded through the Ministry regional offices); and
- deliver services and achieve outcomes in accordance with: policy directives, an approved service plan, and service contracts with the Ministry.

In order to ensure Niagara Region remains in compliance with contracted obligations, it is necessary to appoint an Ontario Works Administrator. Community Services recommends that Ms. Sarah Pennisi be reappointed as the Ontario Works Administrator for Niagara Region.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Brian Hutchings
Commissioner, Community Services

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Sarah Pennisi, Director Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities.