

Resolution 2A

PROMOTING A PROVINCIAL DIALOGUE ON POVERTY IN RURAL SETTINGS (PASSED)

⇒ County of Kings

WHEREAS rural living offers distinct benefits and opportunities for all citizens, including general well-being and a community oriented way of life; and

WHEREAS the Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition has demonstrated that rural citizens living in poverty find it harder than those in urban settings to make their voices heard as they are much more spread out and lack the concentrated numbers required to call attention to issues; and

WHEREAS those most at risk for rural poverty in all areas of Nova Scotia are women, youth, unattached seniors, First Nations and Aboriginals and new immigrants; and

WHEREAS the distances and costs related to travel are a greater challenge for rural residents living in poverty compared to urban settings due to the necessity to travel further distances to access amenities; and

WHEREAS a contributing factor in rural settings is the escalation of out-migration of people seeking work as traditional rural industries struggle or cease operations, the resulting costs of this out-migration affecting the viability of existing services and businesses; and

WHEREAS rural residents statistically have the worst health status, lower educational levels and literacy levels and spend more on food and more often access food banks, due to barriers including low incomes, lack of employment options, the higher costs of living, isolation and the lack of transportation; and

WHEREAS universal policies which do not differentiate effectively between urban and rural poverty may have greater negative impacts on rural versus urban populations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the UNSM enter into discussions with the Province to jointly recognize that risk factors and solutions to rural poverty are unique and require separate policies, apart from the universal policies currently in place; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the UNSM urge the Province to further look at the issues with the purpose of developing policies that specifically address poverty, housing, literacy and other social determinants of health in rural areas.

Response from:
Department of Community Services

RESPONSE:

The Department recognizes that there are multiple risk factors for poverty. Living in a rural area in Nova Scotia, unlike other Canadian provinces, can in fact add to the challenges that poor people face. The solutions to poverty are beyond the mandate of one government department, and indeed one level of government to address. Within the Nova Scotia government practically every department has policies which are meant to address the risk factors for poverty. For example, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has the mandate to ensure Nova Scotian children have access to quality education; Service Nova Scotia has responsibility for the Senior's Property Tax Rebate program; Economic Development (former) with the Department of Finance controls some of the key policy levers for economic development and growth - the key to sustained poverty reduction. Justice is responsible for ensuring that children of divorced parents are supported.

The department is currently examining its Employment Support & Income Assistance (ES/A) benefit structure and, one of the factors for exploration is the access to services across the Province, and the impacts of living in rural areas. Housing Nova Scotia is moving forward with the development of options for homeownership programs and infrastructure improvements for family and seniors' housing, as well as co-ops.

On a broader scale the Department of Finance, through the Tax Review Report, is looking at a series of measures to help/low-income Nova Scotians - including changes to the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Nova Scotia Child Benefit.

Community Services would be prepared to participate in an inter-governmental, inter- departmental forum to discuss the many facets of poverty, and how best to address the rural nature of poverty