

CUTS TO IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT SERVICE AGENCIES

Martha Hall Findlay, MP for Willowdale

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Happy New Year, and all the very best for 2011.

I hope that everyone was able to spend some time with friends and family over the holidays.

Unfortunately, not everyone had good news over Christmas.

Cuts to Immigrant Settlement Service Agencies

Just before the holidays, the Conservative government announced cuts of more than \$50 million from vital settlement services for new immigrants across Canada, with even deeper cuts expected in future years. Some provinces such as Saskatchewan, Alberta and PEI will actually receive increases; Ontario alone, however, will see a CUT of nearly \$44 million—85% of the total—most of that in the GTA.

Several highly effective settlement agencies were informed, just before Christmas, that they would be forced either to close their doors for good, or adapt to cuts of 50 to 100 percent of their federal government funding. Dozens of dedicated staff will be laid off, and thousands of vulnerable new immigrants will be left without support services.

This is of real concern to many people in Willowdale, North York, and the entire Greater Toronto Area. Our communities consist entirely of immigrants, many newly arrived, some whose families arrived generations before. Virtually everyone here, or a family member or a friend, has experienced challenges in settling, due to language, cultural or other differences. Many have overcome

those barriers and been extraordinarily successful. Many, however, need an initial hand up to be able to provide for their families and to become contributing members of the community.

These funding cuts come on the heels of five years of the Conservative government reneging on promised investments in settlement services in Ontario under the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement, negotiated by the previous Liberal government. As of this fall, the Conservative government has held back an estimated \$207 million of money that was to flow in Ontario over the last five years.

We NEED those settlement services and agencies that are being closed. Indeed, we need MORE. I have long advocated, for example, that language is one of the biggest barriers to new Canadians being able to work, to becoming self-sufficient, and to NOT be a drain on society. I have long advocated for MORE funding to provide much-needed language and other skills to newcomers, not LESS. Yet this government is choosing to cut back. Why??

At a time when billions of dollars are being allocated to unnecessary corporate tax breaks, billions more are to be spent on an untendered purchase of stealth fighter attack jets, and billions more will go to US-style mega-prisons (which have been proved time and time again to only make crime problems worse)---where are the Canadian government's priorities? In terms of crime, despite the fearmongering by the government, crime in Canada, including violent crime, has gone DOWN steadily over the last 25 years. This is because successive policies have recognized that prevention is far more cost-effective than punishment. We all believe in law and order, but to prevent crime from happening in the first place, we must be tough on the *causes* of crime: poverty, lack of opportunity, lack of community engagement. So why cut back on settlement services for newcomers, particularly when we know the challenges faced by so many?

We should be investing more, not less, on helping newcomers settle, become self-sufficient and to start contributing, rather than spending billions of dollars we don't have on stealth fighter jets, US-style mega-prisons and unnecessary corporate tax breaks.

If you have any information on settlement agency cuts or closures affecting your neighbourhood or community, or you simply want to tell us your thoughts, please contact my office at HallFindlay.M@parl.gc.ca or 416-223-2858. As always, I and our team are there for you.

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