

# Benefits Reform Action Group

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Atten: Committee Chair: Chuck Porter via Darlene Henry  
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Attention: Mr. Chuck Porter,

Dear Community Services Standing Committee,

We as the Benefits Reform Action Group (BRAG) are writing this letter asking to appear in front of the Community Services Standing Committee. We are asking for an opportunity to address issues with the ESIA (Employment Services and Income Support) program. Our particular concern is regarding annual reviews for ESIA recipients.

First of all, it is concerning that the annual review includes questions that are too personal. For example, clients are asked how much money they have in their pockets. This question asked during annual reviews often makes the client feel that they are expected to empty their pockets in front of the caseworker. This is not only condescending and embarrassing, but a human rights violation. Bank statements are already required for the annual review, asking how much money a person has on them is overstepping boundaries.

Also, there are many problems with the role that doctors are required to play in the annual review. Doctors are required to fill in information that is irrelevant, such as the number of step someone can take. This is not an adequate measure for mobility. Many clients have conditions that vary from one day to the next making it hard to quantify. The number of steps is oversimplifying complex conditions. There have been instances in which doctors simply refuse to complete this section.

Many ESIA clients' circumstances do not change from one year to the next. This is particularly true for clients with permanent disabilities. This not only includes individuals with physical disabilities, but also people with mental health issues and addictions. As for this portion of clients, it is wasteful to engage in annual reviews when everything from the previous year is reiterated.

Other than the obvious fact that people on ESIA are below the poverty line, one of the most significant issues are surrounding caseworkers. Many times caseworkers are not social workers and have no relevant education to make decisions affecting client's lives. They have enormous caseloads which can amount to over 250 files. It is unreasonable to expect that caseworkers have the capacity to meet the needs of their clients when they are so overburdened. These circumstances mean that some clients are not having their annual review every twelve months, but eighteen to twenty months. Clients are left in the dark when annual reviews will be happening and are in constant fear of not receiving their next check.

These are just some of the issues that BRAG is concerned about. We would appreciate the chance to voice our concerns to the Community Services Standing Committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

We await your response!