

Submitted by email to: submissions@ontario.ca



The Honourable Charles Sousa
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

February 1, 2016

Pre-budget input to the Ontario Minister of Finance, Charles Sousa

Dear Minister Sousa,

To the Minister and your distinguished colleagues, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to articulate our interests on the 2016 Provincial budget.

By way of introduction: FOCA is a non-profit, voluntary organization acting on behalf of Ontario's 250,000 residential waterfront property owners, through 500+ volunteer associations from across Ontario. Since being established in 1963, FOCA has served as an information centre and provided assistance and leadership on many crucial (mostly Provincial) issues affecting rural, waterfront Ontario, encouraging a sense of community and community involvement, and fostering environmental stewardship. Our constituents represent the backbone of many rural communities' economic, cultural and social framework.

Today we wish to relay our ongoing concerns about the funding model for Ontario's public services.

We remain particularly concerned with the level of public funding which is borne at the local level. Ontarians pay social costs through property taxes that are higher by 30+% per capita, than all of the rest of Canada. Ontarians pay the highest property taxes in the western world.

The Province should discontinue the reliance on property taxes to provide funding for important public services and reduce the reliance on the volatile property taxation system. We urge you to move quickly to reduce the burden on increasingly overextended municipalities to deliver these programs, especially in rural Ontario. The Province should adequately fund important social services and critical infrastructure through a consistent, progressive source – not property taxes.

The dramatic and ongoing rise in the cost of providing policing is a specific and ongoing concern. In your government's review of the Police Services Act, we strongly urge you to consider the financial implications of this service, and measures the Province can take to provide flexibility and alternate delivery options for municipalities.

The affordability for Ontario homeowners is at real risk – especially in rural areas where electricity and other essential services are more expensive. Likewise the sustainability of rural municipalities who rely on a residential tax base to support increasing amounts of the public spending burden, and in the face of crumbling infrastructure.

We urge real and timely action to rectify the imbalance which has been highlighted many times as part of the **review of Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery**.

It has been FOCA's 50-year legacy to promote sustainable and healthy environments, and economically viable rural communities.

Our organization is part of a growing movement which is striving to imbed a culture of conservation within Ontarians and enable individuals to contribute to a healthy tomorrow. This approach relies on effective levels of public service and adequate funding of the Ministries of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Environment and Climate Change, in particular.

We look to the Province to appropriately fund the agencies of your own making and who have been delegated important responsibilities to safeguard, use and steward Ontario's significant natural legacy.

Provincial responsibilities for managing the otherwise unrelenting advance in the cost of policing, plus the incredible burden of rural infrastructure will help to ensure we can maintain not only the quality of life for rural Ontarians, but also the ability for the economy of rural Ontario to thrive.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terry Rees". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "R".

Terry Rees, Executive Director
On behalf of the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, Inc. (FOCA)