



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

April 13, 2004

Mr. Claude Bécharde
Minister of Employment, Social Solidarity and Family Welfare
Tour de la Place-Victoria Building
800 Square Victoria Street, 28th Floor
Montreal, Quebec H4Z 1B7

Dear Mr. Minister:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal would like to express its reaction to the government *Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* made public on April 2.

With its goal to fight poverty and exclusion, this action plan unquestionably responds to very real needs. Insofar as social cohesion is an important element of sustainable economic development, the Board of Trade agrees with the spirit of the government of Quebec's *Action Plan*.

That said, the Board of Trade is of the view that defining the main strategies for combating poverty requires both a regional approach and sensitivity to regional issues. In this regard, it should be recalled that, in 2002, the Board of Trade submitted a brief to the Social Affairs Commission charged with studying the draft legislation in which it stated, among other things, that it was important for the government to recognize the particular characteristics of regional poverty problems and take them into account when developing an action plan. As stated at the time, this required "that regional measures funded by regionally administered budgets be applied from a regional perspective." For example, Montreal has its own unique poverty and exclusion issues for which a blanket approach would not be appropriate: homelessness, street kids and immigrant integration. It bears mentioning that poverty in Montreal is more pronounced than anywhere else in Quebec.

As such, the Board of Trade would like to commend the government for paying special attention to the particular characteristics of regional poverty in its *Action Plan*. We believe the following extracts from the *Action Plan* are especially promising in this regard:

The territorial approach is the anchor of the *National Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. It will be based on joint regional strategies established under the leadership of regional conferences of elected officials and will revolve around the priority actions and disadvantaged regions that require attention. (p. 69)

Created pursuant to the *Act to combat poverty and social exclusion*, the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales (FQIS) will become one of the main tools to promote the emergence of local strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion in the agreed-upon priority regions [...] The FQIS will invest \$16 million in 2004-2005. (p. 70)

In the coming years, all the government departments and agencies involved will be called upon to support the local strategies and help set up conditions conducive to an integrated intervention focused on the needs of the people and adapted to the specific characteristics of the regions. (p. 72)

The Board of Trade therefore commends this sensitivity to regional realities and hopes that they will lead to initiatives for the Montreal region that are developed, managed and funded according to its realities and specific characteristics. In closing, the Board of Trade would like to once again reiterate its support of the Quebec government's efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Labonté', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Benoit Labonté
President and chief executive officer