

# Social Justice Edition



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November 15, 2020

## WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

Information  
and material:

[www.ssvp.ca/world-day-poor-tools-members](http://www.ssvp.ca/world-day-poor-tools-members)

## CHAIR REPORT

### SAFE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

This is the theme of our national housing campaign that will be launched early in 2021. We are all born with the same human dignity and should have the same right to decent and adequate housing. If you would like to know how you can help, please contact us at [sj-nac@ssvp.ca](mailto:sj-nac@ssvp.ca).

### COVID-19

As we continue towards a recovery from COVID-19, it is also a great time to advocate to governments at all levels to maintain the actions taken to assist the homeless and vulnerable. Why can't these actions lead to a long-term solution to poverty and homelessness? Our voices can help sustain such action and perhaps even lead to positive longer-term results.

### SYSTEMIC RACISM

A nation and its people can be stronger by acknowledging that we have issues that do exist and, in doing so, looking for solutions and taking action to resolve them. There is a direct link between poverty and race in Canada. As an organization that knows poverty and is dedicated to its end, how can we not include ending racism in Canada? As a grassroots organization, we can make a difference at the conference level. Are there fellow racialized parishioners that you could approach and invite to join the Society? Are there community organizations you could invite to speak to your conference about racism? Are there opportunities to collaborate with other churches or organizations in a common effort to address racism? Are there opportunities during home visits to encourage our friends in need to talk about how racism has affected their lives? Can we afford not to act? Our national social justice committee is currently working on ways to address systemic racism. We would like to hear from our members if you have personal experience with racism or a recommendation or comment on how we can develop some effective options for our Society to use. Please send your comments to [jpssvp@hotmail.ca](mailto:jpssvp@hotmail.ca).

In closing, may I thank our social justice members across Canada for their dedication to supporting the need for effective and supportive action and words that address the many social justice issues we face in today's world. Let's hope and pray for a return to normalcy from COVID-19, but let's not forget what we have learned over these past months about poverty and racism. May God bless everyone.

*Jim Paddon, Chair  
National Social Justice Committee*

## CANADA NEEDS BASIC INCOME NOW!

Basic income is an amount of money paid to eligible people on a monthly basis, regardless of their work status. Some people in precarious or other low-paying employment will receive it, as will people who are unemployed. For some of us, this doesn't seem right because people should not receive money for doing nothing. Have we thought about why some people are unemployed? In the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, I serve people who don't have jobs. Some of these people are old, sick or disabled and don't have the health or strength to compete in the job market. Others don't have skills to bring to a workplace because they didn't have the chance to get an education. Others that I serve try to work and grab whatever employment they can, but they can get only part-time or precarious work which may end any time. For precarious workers, our social assistance programs can cause great difficulty. When their jobs end or their pay is inadequate to meet basic needs, dealing with bureaucracy can cause gaps in income which are very stressful. These are our brothers and sisters who are suffering in deep poverty because of where life has landed them. They did not make poor decisions, nor do they deserve their suffering.

Social assistance in Canada is grossly inadequate. The social assistance rates rob people of their mental and physical health and trap them in poverty. Some people receive less than 50% of the low-income measure. Systemic poverty costs taxpayers more than providing them enough to afford nutritious food, shelter and other basic needs. Health professionals are among the strongest advocates for an adequate basic income because poverty makes people a needless burden on the healthcare system.<sup>1</sup>

A basic income has many benefits for the country. People who have the resources to meet their basic needs have better health and require less healthcare. Less poverty often means reduced costs to the justice system.<sup>2</sup> The World Happiness report has shown that countries with generous social programs and less inequality have happier people across the social and economic spectrum.<sup>3</sup>

Basic income provides opportunities for individuals.<sup>4</sup> With basic needs met, recipients can take part-time or precarious work to improve their condition without the stress of worrying about next month's rent. People with enough to live on complete their education and get good jobs. They find opportunities to participate meaningfully in the community and the economy. With a basic income, people have hope and can work towards a better future.

Some worry that a basic income is too expensive for the country. In 2020, the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) developed a model to figure out the cost of a basic income for Canada. He found that it is an affordable program. Furthermore, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) has proven that it is pos-

## CANADA NEEDS BASIC INCOME NOW! ... continued

sible to make it happen fast. Within weeks, people who lost their jobs were receiving money that they needed to live, which shows that bureaucracy is not an obstacle.

The PBO's model for a basic income would give an amount equal to 75% of the low-income measure to adults between the ages of 18 (when families stop receiving the Canada Child Benefit) and 65 (when adults are eligible for old age benefits).<sup>5</sup> Currently, that monthly benefit would be \$2,036 for singles, compared to \$733 on social assistance in Ontario, and \$2,880 for couples, compared to \$1,136 on assistance. Social assistance rates in other provinces are similar to Ontario rates and so the need is great across Canada.

We have known about the benefits of a guaranteed basic income since 1971, when a special senate committee on poverty recommended it. Seventy-five per cent of Canadians support the implementation of a basic income. Economic modeling has proven that a basic income is affordable and actual pilot projects have demonstrated basic income's potential for improving people's lives.

Vincentians must join the movement to make basic income for Canadians a reality. They must learn for themselves the facts about basic income. Then they need to persuade their families and friends about its value. Then they need to advocate with elected representatives to make a basic income part of Canada's social fabric. The facts are available and Vincentians need to participate in the political system to make it a reality. Canada can afford to provide all Canadians the means to live in dignity and health.

*Corry Wink, Social Justice Rep  
Ontario Regional Council*

1. [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bicn/pages/164/attachments/original/1444323422/National\\_Support\\_for\\_a\\_Basic\\_Income\\_Guarantee\\_\(CDN\\_Medical\\_Association\).pdf?1444323422](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bicn/pages/164/attachments/original/1444323422/National_Support_for_a_Basic_Income_Guarantee_(CDN_Medical_Association).pdf?1444323422)
2. <http://www.johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/counter-point-1-poverty-and-crime-is-there-a-connection.pdf>
3. <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/the-nordic-exceptionalism-what-explains-why-the-nordic-countries-are-constantly-among-the-happiest-in-the-world/>
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dzmyyiw7VxM>
5. <https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news/RP-2021-014-M--costing-guaranteed-basic-income-during-covid-pandemic--estimation-couts-lies-un-revenu-base-garanti-pendant-pandemie-covid-19>

### Total welfare incomes in each province in 2018

Taken from: [www.maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/canada/](http://www.maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/canada/)

The table below shows the maximum total welfare income four different household types would have received in 2018 in each province. These amounts are based on a series of assumptions outlined in the [About this resource](#) section.

	Single person considered employable	Single person with a disability*	Single parent, one child	Couple, two children
Alberta	\$8,106	\$10,301*	\$19,927	\$29,238
British Columbia	\$9,042	\$14,802	\$20,782	\$27,006
Manitoba	\$9,756	\$12,403	\$21,764	\$29,918
New Brunswick	\$7,126	\$9,839	\$19,978	\$26,505
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$11,383	\$11,583	\$23,436	\$29,296
Nova Scotia	\$7,437	\$10,268	\$18,240	\$27,756
Ontario	\$9,646	\$14,954	\$21,463	\$30,998
Prince Edward Island	\$10,445	\$11,208	\$20,977	\$32,757
Quebec	\$9,320	\$13,651	\$21,867	\$30,453
Saskatchewan	\$8,883	\$11,422*	\$21,087	\$29,955

\* Alberta and Saskatchewan have specific programs for persons with a severe disability that is likely to be permanent. In 2018, the maximum income of a person with a disability in Alberta's Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program was \$19,786; for someone in the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability program it was \$15,789.

### Total welfare incomes in each territory in 2018

The next table shows the same information but for the territories. It is based on the same methodology as the provincial figures, but they are not directly comparable because of the distinct situation in the territories (for more on the methodology, see the [About this resource](#) section).

	Single person considered employable	Single person with a disability	Single parent, one child	Couple, two children
Northwest Territories	\$22,163	\$27,553	\$34,447	\$45,567
Nunavut	\$7,782	\$10,782	\$18,098	\$29,561
Yukon	\$18,093	\$21,747	\$34,003	\$50,489

The welfare incomes in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories were generally higher than in the provinces, reflecting the higher cost of living in the territories. Conversely, welfare incomes in Nunavut were considerably lower than in the other two territories, reflecting the high proportion of households on social assistance living in subsidized housing whose living costs are reduced through housing subsidies.

# RACE AND RACISM: CAN WE TALK?

Why talk? We must, because the manifestations of race and racism continue to be a contentious issue. Since the beginning of time, racism has been an iniquity powerfully rooted in society, and its elimination has proven to be impossible. Many believe that the world society has worked towards ending this iniquity; however, it still exists. One only has to look deep inside social interactions to spot racial discrimination.

Racism comes in different forms, from looking at others differently to commenting or judging a person by how they look or speak. Taken in isolation, each incident may seem trivial, but over time they can really add up. So often we in the Black community are told, "Forget about these incidents, don't dwell on the evils of slavery, and just carry on." How can we carry on when the bite of racism continues to sting? How can we move on when we are still being shackled by the stench of racism rooted in the past, and still thriving in institutions and society today? This is not self-pity, but the reality of endured racism that begs not to be sugar-coated.

<sup>1</sup>Despite the number of positive steps taken by Canada to protect individuals from unfair and unequal treatment, many organizations remain non-compliant. In other words, creative ways are applied to uphold institutional and systemic racism, much to the detriment of Black people. It is a lingering virus that persists in our schools, workplace, justice systems and elsewhere. Embedded in these systems are behaviors that reproduce and perpetuate discriminatory barriers, resulting in unequal economic opportunity. Let's talk about racism in education, the labour market and the justice system, to name a few.

Racism has always existed in our education system. Noteworthy is that the last segregated school in Ontario only closed in 1965, followed by Halifax in 1983.<sup>2</sup> Some local Canadian school boards have recently acknowledged that anti-Black racism still exists in the education system. One damaging aspect highlighted is that Black children are very often unfairly streamed into special education classes. As such they become disruptive out of boredom, are expelled from school, and then some are criminalized as adults. Once imprisoned, they are locked into a trajectory of life competing for resources. Hence the downward spiral begins!

<sup>3</sup>In 2017, Black students were 12% of the Toronto District School Board student population, but represented 48% of all expulsions.

As for the labour market, it's no surprise that discrimination is a regular occurrence.<sup>4</sup> Statistical data have shown there are hiring processes that contribute to persistent racial inequality in employment decisions. Blacks remain substantially disadvantaged relative to equally qualified non-blacks. Once hired, Black people still experience low pay, harassment and limited career progression. As well, regardless of job performance, non-Black employees get promotions or pay raises faster than their Black counterpart. This, I have experienced. To create a racially just workplace, business leaders must object to biases in a genuine way.

Similarly, Canadian Justice System is fraught with racism that disproportionately impacts Black people.<sup>5</sup> In 2016, 40% of inmates in segregation at the Toronto South Detention Centre were Black, but they are only 7.5% of the Toronto population. Black males are three times more likely to be carded by police, without any evidence that they have been involved in, or have any knowledge of an offence. They are also 20 times more likely to be shot dead by police. Use of knee-on-neck restraint is still being defended by the Edmonton police, despite the ensuing outrage and obvious brutality. As such, we can see differences in how people are valued. Yet amid the growing anger, a number of prominent Canadians – premiers, and the head of the RCMP – have denied that racism has a strong foothold in our Justice system. To wake these politicians up from their deep slumber, we must all consistently shout the need for change.

Although progress has been made, there are also moments that illustrate the deep well of suffering that exists for many Black people in the world. Racism is more than an individual issue. For there to be change, public advocacy is critical. Continued silence fosters an unethical privilege that allows for a false sense of entitlement and eventual chaos. Speaking up is essential!

**"Not everything that is faced  
can be changed but nothing can  
be changed until it is faced."**

*James Baldwin*

*Valerie Alexander, Social Justice rep  
St. Mary's Conference, Tillsonburg, Ontario*

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1. Canadian Human Rights Act 1977  
Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination ratified by Canada October 1970
  2. Investigation of PDSB (Peel District School Board) May 2020
  3. [ocasi.org/new-fact-sheets-show-growing-racial-disparities-canada](http://ocasi.org/new-fact-sheets-show-growing-racial-disparities-canada)
  4. [sociologicalscience.com/download/vol-6/june/SocSci\\_v6\\_467to496.pdf](http://sociologicalscience.com/download/vol-6/june/SocSci_v6_467to496.pdf)
  5. OHRC (Ontario Human Rights Commission) Report racial profiling and discrimination December 2018

# HOMELESSNESS AND SENIORS

**Homelessness** is when an individual or family find themselves without affordable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the ability to acquire it.

There are many factors that can cause homelessness among the senior population in Canada, such as,

- Poverty – Insufficient income.
- Isolation – Death of a spouse, social isolation.
- Illness – Medical bills or even mental illness.

Homelessness for seniors can also increase because of discrimination or lack of knowledge about the availability of government or private services. However, the main cause of homelessness for seniors is a lack of financial resources. Seniors who do not have the financial means to afford housing may end up living on the street.

Mental illness can also be a huge factor in causing homelessness among the senior population. Psychologically, seniors who suffer from mental illness, Alzheimer's as an example, are sometimes incapable of applying for the various benefits they are entitled to receive and even living on their own as a result of their illness.

A lot of the homeless seniors are also veterans. The experiences they had when fighting for our freedom abroad take their toll over time, leading to mental health disorders, to substance abuse, and to physical handicaps that often make what we call a normal life virtually impossible.

The rest of us, including Vincentians, can also become homeless as we age or our social circumstances change, as in the loss of a spouse. As we have seen with the appearance of the COVID-19 virus, anyone's life plans can change instantly.

Homeless people, especially seniors, are also more vulnerable to physical or financial abuse and sexual attacks. When they find themselves homeless suddenly, and do not have the street smarts to navigate this new life, they can fall victim to predators and, in extreme cases, may even lose their lives.

**WE KEEP TALKING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE! WELL, HOMELESSNESS IS A CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE. WE, AS HUMANS, AS VINCENTIANS, AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO TRY AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN RESOLVING THIS PARTICULAR SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE.**

In November 2018, the last homeless count in Edmonton, Alberta was around 2,200 individuals. Homeward Trust, through its program to end homelessness in that city, continues to reduce the number of homeless people. But the City of Edmonton is short of affordable housing, social housing, and permanent supportive housing for the homeless.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has affected many things in everyone's life and homelessness is not an exception. Because of the loss of jobs, many people have not been able to pay rent and utility bills and may find themselves living on the street. I am sure that at the next homeless count, the number will be much higher.

In my view, the first thing we all need to do is educate ourselves and our members on the issue of HOMELESSNESS. If I think about it, I, for one, do not know a lot about it. To make a difference, we need to know about homelessness and how to bring about solutions to this challenging issue.

Above all, we need to invoke the aid of our Lord, Jesus Christ and of His Mother Mary to first see us through this pandemic and, second, to give us the necessary tools and assistance to deal with this huge problem that in the end, affects us all.

Then, we can be of real help to our homeless sisters and brothers.

*Maria Lupul  
Western Region Chair  
Social Justice Committee*

## SOLVING THE HOMELESS ISSUE WITH THE EXPERTISE OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

In Kelowna, we have a Circle of Experts leading the Journey Home Strategy to End Homelessness. The circle is aptly called **LECoH (Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness)**. This article will review who the members are, how they were chosen, how they do their work, how they recruit and retain members, payment for services, etc.

Kelowna City Council established a task force in 2017 to find solutions to homelessness as we had become a hub for the homeless and we had a real problem. The problem was not the unsightliness or other common factors but rather the frustration that nothing was working to alleviate the problem. A group of city leaders began discussions and immediately decided that a **LIVED EXPERIENCE CIRCLE** was critical. A convenor was hired, word was spread throughout the existing shelter system, and on the streets that **their voices were needed**. To entice folks, lunch was provided, along with gift cards. We began with about 15 to 20 but within six months we had over 100 people attending every two weeks. The locations were always neutral, generally the public library. Questions were asked about types of housing, demographics in a housing complex, meals, drug and alcohol use, safety, programs, staffing, curfews, and more.

Through this process, BC Housing, the funder of affordable and supportive Housing in BC, was engaged and was asked to listen and learn. A group of the Lived Experience attendees were asked to form a circle of 12 to continue the process, to advocate, to work with the community and to stay in constant touch with the newly housed and also those continuing to sleep rough. In the past three years, just in our city, we have added 300 new supportive housing spaces (not repurposed, but new) and over 100 scattered sites. LECOh members visit all areas every two to three weeks, listen and bring the information to the people who can make decisions. During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this has become even more crucial. LECOh members are part of a weekly ZOOM meeting and our voices are heard. Community engagement is a critical function as NIMBYISM is alive and well in Kelowna, just as in all cities. Being called "Those People" is not easy but LECOh members know it is important. A strong bond has developed among the members to help cope with the challenges.

### How does this apply to SSVP?

**We, as Vincentians need to listen to our families, really listen and not assume we know what is best.** Has your conference ever asked your families what food products they really like? Have you asked them if they prefer gift cards instead of a food hamper or have you just decided and then proceeded? Have we considered cultural needs, for example providing vegetarian or even vegan hampers? Have we ever asked our families if they can get to the store if we give them gift cards? Or which store they prefer?

Often, we as people who want the best will decide not to include certain items as they are not "healthy enough". However, a single person who is working to manage an addiction may really need that sugar filled cereal for a while, or a young Mom may not want jam if she has a toddler and the sugar is a stimulant or...

So how can we proceed? We can, and I think need to, invite (after COVID-19) a few of our families to gather and ask the questions; we need to provide a meal and an honorarium; **but, most of all, we need to listen**. The meeting place needs to be neutral, not everyone is comfortable at a church hall or basement. The time of day needs to be considered based on the families in our neighborhood: working or stay at home for example. We may need to offer bus tickets or child care. The main thing is to make ourselves welcoming and accessible.

We may not like what we hear so we need to prepare ourselves to not be defensive but to be open to their ideas. Who are the experts? We Vincentians with big hearts, or the family receiving support?

But what we do with the information is then critical. If we continue on as if nothing ever happened, word will spread and we will lose our credibility. We may need to design several basic hampers, meat lovers, vegan, vegetarian, sugar free, peanut free, nothing that requires refrigeration or nothing that requires a can opener, or maybe an environmentally friendly hamper with little to no plastic wrapping. **LET US ASK OUR FAMILIES AND LET US TRULY OFFER SERVICE WITH HOPE.**

**PS. Family is defined as a person or group of persons who call and ask for our support. We do not judge based on who is part of the family, the size of family or any other factors.**

*Elaine McMurray, National Social Justice Committee  
BC/Yukon Regional Council*

## MANY NEW BRUNSWICKERS SPEND MORE THAN HALF OF THEIR INCOME ON HOUSING

In New Brunswick, the housing situation is dire for low-income people. A large proportion of homes are upscale, and the average price in Moncton is around \$ 1,170. For many poor people seeking accommodation, unless they have an apartment subsidized by the Department of Social Development, the situation is worrying. Indeed, in New Brunswick, 36% of households spend more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. However, 14% even have to spend more than 50% on accommodation ([www.rentalhousingindex.ca](http://www.rentalhousingindex.ca)). So for a low-income person, especially one on welfare, it is bewildering how much time and effort it takes to find affordable housing.

Since 2016, in the Moncton area, a dozen volunteers from the Mother Teresa Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul have been reaching out to people looking for housing. Such a service is part of a national housing campaign organized by the Canadian Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, who advocates for healthy, safe and affordable housing. In order to raise awareness among New Brunswickers about the difficulties faced by less fortunate people in finding a rent suitable for their income in Moncton, two members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul consulted Kijiji, a centralized network of websites that publishes online availability and price of rents. On August 19, 2020, they listed the top 100 successive rental housing offers in Moncton, Dieppe and Riverview. The data collection allowed them to identify the real availability of housing. They found 8 bachelor type apartments, 30 one-bedroom units and 62 two-bedroom units.

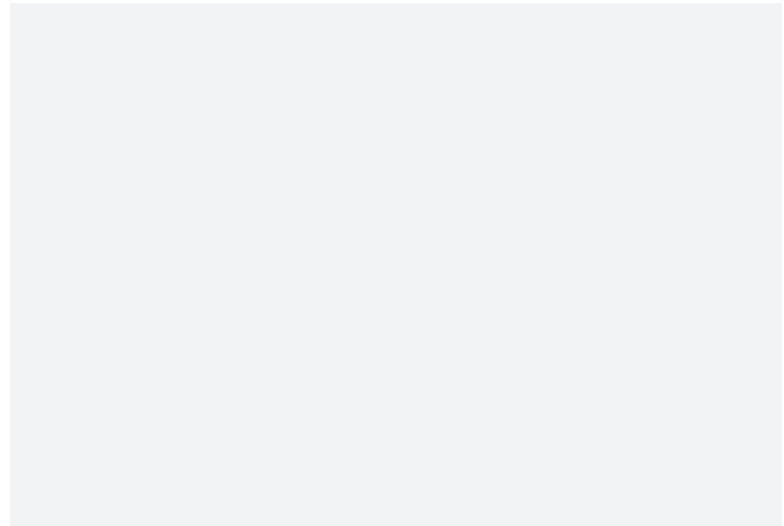
An analysis of the price of those 100 rental units was carried out to determine how many tenants could find housing while spending only 30% of their income, a percentage recognized as reasonable for housing. In New Brunswick, at the minimum wage of \$ 11.70 an hour, someone who works 35 hours a week for a full year earns \$ 1,774 a month. However, at that monthly income, a person should not have to pay more than \$ 532 per month for housing.

Data collected on Kijiji indicates that for the 8 bachelor apartments, prices range from \$ 525 to \$ 1,395, which amounts to an average of \$ 796 per month. For the 30 single bedroom units, prices range from \$ 650 to \$ 1,595, or an average of \$ 980 per month. As for the 62 rents with two bedrooms, the prices listed range from \$ 705 to \$ 2,599, with an average of \$ 1,342 per month. To put a roof over your head, either the minimum wage must be much higher than it is now, or both parents must each have a job. As a result, people on welfare usually have only one solution, renting a simple room and resorting to food banks and soup kitchens.

Organizations that work with the less fortunate know their anguish when looking for housing. The construction of many expensive apartment blocks does not match the current demand for more affordable housing. The population at the bottom 20% of the income scale faces enormous challenges. Because of the great need for subsidized housing, governments should invest more in the construction of low-cost housing because currently, the supply of subsidized housing is far from meeting demand.

Unless our governments invest more in building affordable housing in order to dramatically increase the number, the future is worrisome for those at the bottom of the wage scale. There is a risk of seeing an increase in the number of households living in housing that is too small. Many families will not be able to afford larger and more expensive housing. They will be subject to overcrowding for lack of space, which can increase the likelihood of conflict, abuse, domestic violence and instability in school for children. If governments walk away from helping renters across the country, it should come as no surprise that homelessness is on the rise.

*Auréa Cormier, n.d.s.c., Social Justice Committee  
Atlantic Regional Council*



Typical Moncton housing renting for \$1,150 per month



## MISSION

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organization whose mission is:

To live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

## VALUES

The mission of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul implies that as Vincentians we:

- see Christ in anyone who suffers
- come together as a family
- have personal contact with the poor
- help in all possible ways

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