

May 20, 2020

Right Honourable Prime Minister Trudeau
P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: A Call for a Basic Income Program

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Thank you for your leadership in mitigating the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis on workers living on low incomes. The rapid implementation and distribution of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) have enabled many individuals and families to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads.

In order to ensure that those eligible for these benefits – as well as others whose income falls short of need – attain ongoing economic stability, we ask that you initiate a national Basic Income program. As we work to define who we will be as a country after this first pandemic wave, a Basic Income program will aid the most vulnerable and help reverse the growing income inequities we have observed in the recent past.

The Covid-19 virus will continue to have a major impact on our lives and our country over the coming months – and years. Many employees and small business owners will not have a job to which they can return; nor will child care be available for many in the foreseeable future. These and other challenges will create new hurdles for workers earning low incomes.

We are deeply concerned that people in our community whose income was below a living wage pre-pandemic will fall further behind when the CERB benefits end. Other people on low incomes, who do not qualify for CERB benefits (e.g., many people with disabilities, seniors, people who are homeless, and victims of domestic violence), are currently subsisting on a monthly income far lower than the CERB benefit prior to the pandemic. Without the additional support of a Basic Income program, they will continue to struggle to make ends meet while facing new economic challenges.

Now, as the Covid-19 emergency appears to be at least temporarily abating, we urge you – in collaboration with your fellow parliamentarians – to develop a Basic Income program to provide a secure economic “floor” for all Canadians. This will provide a fundamental economic security to those who currently have none, give a

major financial boost to local communities across the country (people who have had to “do without” will spend their money locally), and develop a “positive legacy for all Canadians.” (Canada Senate letter, April 21, 2020)

Basic Income programs may take many forms (e.g., universal or targeted; one benefit amount or sliding scale). As advocates for people living on low incomes, our primary concerns are that the benefit be adequate to meet people’s basic needs and that all other government income programs remain intact.

Here in Nova Scotia, one in ten Nova Scotia workers are employed in a seasonal job, many in the tourist, agricultural and fishing sectors. Seasonal economic fluctuations, multiple short-term jobs through an informal economy, and transportation issues all complicate the attainment of income security for many people. Always financially challenging and unpredictable, workers’ future income will now be even harder to anticipate. As this pandemic evolves and, eventually, dissipates, other concerns loom – the climate crisis and related natural disasters, a global economic slide, and/or future pandemics. We are living in volatile times.

A Basic Income program will provide a consistent, predictable minimum income guarantee. This commitment will provide long-term economic and social benefit to the most economically vulnerable Canadians, both marginalized workers and people living on low incomes who are outside the workforce. It will make our communities and country stronger.

We look forward to working with you on this life-changing project, in conjunction with other anti-poverty groups around Nova Scotia and the country.

Thank you for the all the positive work you do on behalf of all of us.

Sincerely,

Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition
Affordable Energy Coalition
Annapolis Valley Poverty Coalition
Antigonish Arts Fair & Arts House
Antigonish Community Transit Society
Antigonish Culture Alive
Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund
Antigonish Food Security Association
Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board
Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association
Arts Health Antigonish
Cape Breton Coalition for Social Justice
Coady International Institute
Colchester Anti-Poverty Network

Community Cares Youth Outreach, Sydney Mines - Cape Breton
End the War on Women Collective
Every Woman's Centre
Guysborough Community Health Board
LEA Place
Martha Justice Ministry, Sisters of Saint Martha
Martha Ministry of Spirituality
Nova Scotia College of Social Workers
Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual Assault Centre
Responsible Energy Action
Second Story Women's Centre
Sisters of Charity, Halifax
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Holy Family Conference, Amherst
St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department
St. James United Church Social Justice Committee
Strait Area Women's Place
Syria Antigonish Families Embrace (SAFE) Society
The Lotus Centre
Tri-County Women's Resource Centre
Upper Big Tracadie Seniors Action Club
Women's Place Resource Centre

CC: The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister of Canada; The Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance; Mr. Sean Fraser, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and Associate Minister of Finance; Mr. Florian Leuprecht, First Secretary, Human Rights and Social Affairs, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations; The Honourable Andrew Scheer, MP, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada; Mr. Yves-François Blanchet, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois; Mr. Jagmeet Singh, MP, Leader of the New Democratic Party; Ms. Jo-Ann Roberts, Interim Leader of the Green Party of Canada; The Honourable Stephen McNeil, Premier of Nova Scotia