

END HOMELESSNESS

ST. JOHN'S #WECANENDIT

July 7, 2020

Hon. Christopher Mitchelmore
Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour

RE: END HOMELESSNESS ST. JOHN'S AND MEMBERS OF OUR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS COMMUNITY CALL FOR A ONE-TIME AMENDMENT TO THE INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT ACT TO WAIVE THE PENALTIES IMPOSED UPON INCOME SUPPORT RECIPIENTS WHO RECEIVE THE CANADA EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT

Dear Minister Mitchelmore,

With the ongoing uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's declaration of a public health emergency, End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ), and concerned community groups who serve our most vulnerable neighbours are **calling on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to make a one-time amendment to the Income and Employment Support Act and associated regulations to waive any penalties imposed upon Income Support recipients who have also received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).**

After a number of conversations with community organizations and AESL staff, it is clear that in order to ensure Income Support recipients are not penalized for receiving the CERB, the quickest mechanism left to pursue is legislative and regulatory amendments under of the *Income and Employment Support Act* and the *Income and Employment Support Regulations*.

Current AESL Directives outlined by the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour as per a public advisory from June 8, 2020 state that:

While some Income Support clients may qualify for the CERB because they had employment earnings in the last year; others will not qualify. It is important to note, individuals cannot receive both provincial Income Support and the CERB at the same time. Should Income Support clients receive the CERB, they will no longer qualify for Income Support, and benefits will be suspended immediately. An overpayment will be set up on Income Support files where there is an overlap in payments from the CERB.

The CERB was implemented without the usual checks and balances in order to deliver payments to Canadians quickly and easily in a time of great need and uncertainty for a period of up to 24 weeks. Individuals have had to make the best decisions for themselves and their families based on available information, even as both federal and provincial policies continue to shift beneath their feet.

Our province cannot afford to have our neighbours who rely on Income Supports see their income, housing health and supplementary supports jeopardized. **Enforcing penalties on Income Support recipients who received a federal benefit places the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in the position to absorb the social and financial costs that arise with increases in homelessness, incarceration and healthcare system usage.** Any cost savings accrued by AESL will be shifted to Justice, Health and Housing, at a far greater cost.

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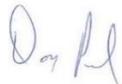
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The impacts of the decision to enforce penalties for Income Support recipients will create undue hardship on front-line community organizations, who are already overburdened in addressing increased needs that have arisen during the pandemic, as impacted individuals will most certainly turn to these organizations for support.

In this uncertain time, it is more important than ever for our neighbours in need of Income Support to maintain access to sustainable income, especially the direct payment of rent, health and supplemental benefits they need for daily living. Enforcing penalties will only add to an overburdened social safety system, which can be avoided with one-time amendments to the *Income and Employment Support Act* and its associated regulations.

As always, your support is appreciated. We look forward to continuing to work together to ensure the safety and health of our most vulnerable neighbours in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sincerely,



Doug Pawson, MPhil, MBA
Executive Director
End Homelessness St. John's

The following individuals have read and endorse this letter of advocacy:

<p>Joanne Thompson Executive Director <i>The Gathering Place</i></p>	<p>Laura Winters Executive Director <i>St. John's Status of Womens Council</i></p>		<p>Angela Crockwell Executive Director <i>Thrive CYN</i></p>
<p>Abigail Sheppard, BA, BSW, RSW Assistant Executive Director <i>AIDS Committee of NL</i></p>	<p>Heidi Edgar, BA, BSW, MSW, RSW Program Manager <i>Canadian Mental Health Association NL</i></p>		<p>Mari-Lynne Sinnott, MD CCFP Co-Owner <i>Clinic 215</i></p>
<p>Gail Thornhill, MSW, RSW Director, Housing Services <i>Stella's Circle</i></p>	<p>Morgan Hare Executive Director <i>First Light</i> <i>St. John's Friendship Centre</i></p>		<p>Sheldon Pollett Executive Director <i>Choices for Youth</i></p>
<p>Cindy Murphy Executive Director <i>John Howard Society NL</i></p>	<p>Judy Tobin Manager Non-Profit Housing <i>City of St. John's</i></p>	<p>Simone Lilly Affordable Housing Facilitator <i>City of St. John's</i></p>	<p>Mohamed Abdallah Executive Director <i>Connections for Seniors</i></p>

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