

The Hon. Karina Gould

The Hon. Ahmed Hussein

The Hon. Carla Qualtrough

The Hon. Carolyn Bennett

The Hon. Jean Yves Duclos

The Hon. Chrystia Freeland

The Hon. Sean Fraser

The Hon. Patty Hadju

The Hon. Dominic LeBlanc

The Hon. Diane Lebouthillier

The Hon. Seamus O'Regan

The Hon Marc Miller

The Hon. Marci Ien

The Hon. Kamal Khera

November, 2021

Dear Ministers,

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate each of you on your new appointments to Cabinet on October 26, 2021. We are confident that all Canadians are cautiously optimistic that Canada's new government will be successful in achieving its policy agenda.

The continuing pandemic and the immediate post-pandemic period will provide each of you with new and unique challenges that will allow your government to make an indelible mark on Canada's recovery.

For those of us with an interest in poverty reduction and income security reform, there are 14 responsibility areas where policy concerns impinge on your portfolios. As a group you represent more than one third of the Cabinet.

In 2019, Canada adopted new poverty reduction legislation that included Canada's new poverty line – the Market Basket Measure (MBM) - and a legislated goal to reduce poverty in Canada by 50% by 2030.

We write today to ask each of you, both in terms of your own portfolios and as an important collective force in Cabinet, to do everything within your mandates to achieve the legislated goals that must now be achieved in just over eight years.

Minister Gould must continue to work to end child poverty.

Minister Hussen must make housing deeply affordable while meeting diversity and intersectional gender commitments in the NHS and to work across ministries to ensure poverty is reduced for marginalized communities

Minister Qualtrough must reform Employment Insurance and reverse the course that continues to place and keep more and more people with disabilities in poverty.

Minister Bennett must confront the clear connection between addictions and poverty and provide a roadmap to ensure that person with addictions will find a way out of poverty.

Minister Duclos must address the social determinants of health and find new ways to ensure that poverty reduction will lead to improved health while better health will lead to pathways out of poverty.

Minister Freeland must ensure that the personal income tax system supports the income security measures that will reduce and eradicate both working poverty and child poverty while providing a system that is responsive to poverty reduction.

Minister Fraser will know that immigrant and refugee poverty and the precarious status of many newcomers is a major part of Canada's poverty landscape and must invent new and innovative ways to prevent newcomers from falling into poverty while accelerating their exit from it.

Ministers Hadju and Miller have oversight of portfolios that deal with Indigenous peoples. The number of Indigenous people who receive income assistance is six times the numbers who receive it in the wider society. Their communities experience 'living standard' poverty in addition to income poverty. Ministers responsible must correct and resolve Indigenous poverty. Integral to poverty reduction in Indigenous communities will be nation to nation, Inuit to Crown, and government to government relations that must be led by these communities themselves.

Minister LeBlanc has responsibility for the intergovernmental portfolio. Provinces and territories are hard pressed to deal with poverty given their limited resources and health care responsibilities. Minister LeBlanc must bring provinces and territories to the table to ensure that subnational jurisdictions do not vacate the responsibilities they now carry. The Canada Disability Benefit is a case in point.

Minister Lebouthillier, with her responsibility for the Canada Revenue Agency, must assure this agency meets the enormous responsibility to deliver refundable credits to low-income Canadians.

The Agency has been clearly challenged throughout the pandemic with a clear incapacity to respond to low-income people appropriately. The challenges are clear.

As Minister of Labour, Minister O'Regan is responsible for labour standards, minimum wages and workforce development at the federal level. Working poverty is often precarious and racialized. It is the most prevalent form of poverty in Canada and must be reduced drastically in order to meet the 2030 objectives set out in legislation. Labour standards will be important and he must assure Canadians that in order to meet the 2030 goals, all possible measures will be implemented to meet the required standards.

Gender equality and the interests of youth are integral to poverty reduction. As Minister of gender equality and youth, there is an expectation of Minister Ien that gendered poverty and poverty among 2SLGBTQ+ will not just be addressed but overcome as an important element of the 2030 objectives. Poverty among youth is an equally important reduction and eradication goal. Minister Ien must also assure Canadians that her share of the 2030 goals will be met.

Minister Khara has responsibility for seniors and in this role has the job of completing the important job of eradicating seniors' poverty. Canada is close to achieving this goal but many immigrant seniors especially remain in poverty due to legacy policies that are in many ways designed to keep newcomer seniors in poverty. This matter must be addressed in the current mandate.

In closing, although you do not comprise a formal committee of Cabinet, you are the de facto 'Cabinet Committee on Poverty'.

Canadians expect poverty reduction and they expect you to act swiftly together to meet the goals that your government set for you in legislation in 2019. Your goal cannot be to take the least poor and merely place them a few dollars over the poverty line. Your goal must be to address deep as well as shallow poverty.

Fourteen Ministers can make a difference. You can meet the 2030 goals set in legislation. We urge you to pledge now to realize this important objective.

Yours Truly



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