

Honourable Rochelle Squires, Minister of Families
Room 357 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0V8
cc: Deputy Minister of Families

February 2, 2021

Dear Minister Squires,

We are writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment as the Minister of Families for the Province of Manitoba. We believe that support for Manitoba's families, particularly those living in poverty, will be crucial as the Province of Manitoba continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts, and we anticipate your term as Minister of Families will be focused on addressing these serious challenges.

Make Poverty History Manitoba is a multi-sectoral, collaborative coalition of organizations and individuals from Indigenous, newcomer, disability, labour, business, women's, student, youth, faith groups, urban, rural, and northern communities. We are guided by our vision of a Manitoba without poverty.

The purpose of Make Poverty History Manitoba (MPHM) is to provide a central coalition of organizations and individuals working for the elimination of poverty in Manitoba. The coalition is committed to our mission of changing public policy to achieve a Manitoba without poverty.

We are a leading voice on public policy for poverty reduction in Manitoba. Our coalition's policy recommendations are consistently endorsed by our 100+ member organizations who work on the frontlines with many of Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens. Many of our members themselves have lived experience with poverty.

To achieve our objectives, we consult broadly, gather research, develop policy recommendations, advocate for policy change, generate public awareness of the impact of poverty, and mobilize Manitobans in support of poverty elimination. For a full description of our work, please visit: makepovertyhistorymb.com/about/

In 2015, *Make Poverty History Manitoba*, along with community partners, updated [*The View From Here: Manitobans Call for a Renewed Poverty Reduction Plan*](#). Prior to the provincial election of 2016, six recommendations were prioritized, based on extensive community consultation using the *View From Here* as the basis for discussion.

These six thematic priorities continue to guide our advocacy to the Government of Manitoba:

1. [Comprehensive Plan](#): Establish a meaningful and bold target and timeline for ending poverty in Manitoba
2. [Minimum Wage](#): Raise the minimum wage to a poverty line wage of \$16.58 per hour
3. [Social Housing](#): Build at least 300 new social housing units annually for five years
4. [Livable Basic Needs Benefit](#): Double the basic needs allowance for Employment and Income Assistance recipients while transitioning the program to one based in dignity with pathways to meaningful employment for those who are willing to work.
*We also recognize that the Province of Manitoba is endeavouring to create a **new income support program for people with disabilities**. We support efforts to make income supports accessible and to reflect the actual income needs of people living with disabilities to support healthy and dignified lives with full participation in Manitoba society. [Please see our January 2020 submission on the program with three principles we believe should be key to the forthcoming program](#).*
5. [Child Care](#): Create at least 17,000 subsidized childcare spaces with priority in low-income neighbourhoods
6. [Mental Health](#): Double the funding allotted to community-based mental health services for low income Manitobans.

In November 2020, we wrote an [open letter](#) to your predecessor as the Minister of Families about our fears of an impending humanitarian and poverty crisis in Manitoba because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is broad consensus that COVID-19 disproportionately affects people living in poverty as income is a social determinant of health. MPHM is concerned poverty and homelessness will be exacerbated as the pandemic surges. We appreciate having received a prompt response from Minister Stefanson, but we remain concerned that our concerns were not fully addressed and that our three recommendations are still crucial for Manitobans living in poverty, particularly on issues related to income and housing. We have included them below as reference:

The following immediate actions can be taken by the Government of Manitoba to reduce poverty and homelessness and stop the spread of COVID-19.

1. Fully exempt the CERB, CRB and other federal COVID-19 recovery measures from EIA claw backs to ensure EIA benefits are not interrupted or reduced.
2. Increase the EIA allowances for single adults by \$383 per month and for people with disabilities by \$236 per month and transform EIA into a Liveable Basic Needs Benefit.
3. Reinstate the provincial eviction ban to prevent homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during Code Red restrictions.

Thank you for your attention on this matter. MPHM is available to meet with you and representatives of your government.

Sincerely,

Provincial Working Group,
Make Poverty History Manitoba
For contact: chair@makepovertyhistorymb.com