



April 21, 2020

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

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister
Privy Council Office
Room 1000
85 Sparks Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3

The Honourable Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin Street, 17th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5

Dear Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Morneau:

Subject: COVID-19 Pandemic – Minimum Basic Income

This is a unique moment in our history – a moment when Canadians from across the political and economic spectrum have seen before them the value of a program which would not require complicated application and qualification processes, but which would be there for people in times of need. As members of the Senate of Canada, we are writing to you to thank you and urge a further evolution of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

Firstly, we want to express our genuine thanks and appreciation to Canadian Governments -- Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Municipal, as well as opposition parties for all collaborative efforts to date.

In these extraordinary times, the “Team Canada” approach being demonstrated by public service officials at all levels is both heartening and encouraging, particularly in the continually evolving

development of needs-based crisis policy responses. For this and the climate of hope and optimism during this pandemic, we thank you.

As you have noted, governmental responses continue to evolve. We are writing to address an opportunity for further positive development with respect to the CERB.

Based upon what we are all hearing from Canadians, we believe it is very clear there will continue to be a need to create additional patches to the CERB to stop other groups of Canadians from falling through the cracks. Further administrative work will also be required to renew eligibility of individuals in the next months and beyond.

Moving forward, we encourage you to finish the work you have commenced by restructuring the CERB to ensure greater social and economic equity as well as greater efficiency.

Using the tax rolls to send a crisis minimum income to all who are in need would accomplish these two key goals. In terms of efficiency, as we are already seeing, it can quickly get support to Canadians who are in dire straits. CRA can issue these payments by deposit or mail with little more than the push of a button. People in need require support today. In terms of social and economic equity, it would allow for a more expeditious application of the benefit to those vulnerable Canadians for whom support will otherwise be required. Each new initiative takes time to craft and time to implement, leaving those most vulnerable to experience chronic hardship.

The use of the CRA tax rolls could also free up public service capacity that is currently stretched as public servants strive to administer applications, assess and, with each new measure, reassess eligibility and processing payments. The liberated time and resources could be utilized to help people not currently on the tax rolls to convert their applications to tax files. Such measures could ensure quick payment for individual Canadians while simultaneously increasing the ease of administration and sustainability of supports that we can already recognize will be needed beyond the current timeline for the program, and into the foreseeable future.

Increasing public service capacity will enable officials to respond more quickly and efficiently by freeing up their time to identify and address the needs of those individuals and groups who might still fall through the cracks.

Ministers, we know you recognize that the layering of each fix to the CERB, while vital and welcome, means delays in getting the most needed help to the people who are already most vulnerable to economic and therefore health insecurity.

In the short term, our focus must be on ensuring the CERB is available for all who need it. When this immediate emergency has abated, we urge you to work with Parliamentarians and others to use the lessons from the CERB experience and the entire COVID-19 crisis to craft social and economic reforms and develop a positive legacy for all Canadians.

We are in touch with many Canadian individuals and organizations who support this approach and are encouraging us to convey to you the urgent need for these types of measures.

We are keen to support and assist you to take steps in order to ensure that all people are included and have their place on “Team Canada”. Thank you once again and we wish you and all Canadians all the best as we work together to stay safe and well.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is 'Frances Lankin' and the signature on the right is 'Kim Pate'. Both signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Honourable Frances Lankin and Kim Pate, Senators, with and on behalf of:

The Honourable Margaret Dawn Anderson, Senator
The Honourable Wanda Thomas Bernard, Senator
The Honourable Robert Black, Senator
The Honourable Peter Boehm, Senator
The Honourable Gwen Boniface, Senator
The Honourable Patricia Bovey, Senator
The Honourable Yvonne Boyer, Senator
The Honourable Patrick Brazeau, Senator
The Honourable Bev Busson, Senator
The Honourable Larry Campbell, Senator
The Honourable Jane Cordy, Senator
The Honourable René Cormier, Senator
The Honourable Brent Cotter, Senator
The Honourable Mary Coyle, Senator
The Honourable Donna Dasko, Senator
The Honourable Dennis Dawson, Senator
The Honourable Colin Deacon, Senator
The Honourable Marty Deacon, Senator
The Honourable Mike Duffy, Senator
The Honourable Pat Duncan, Senator
The Honourable Lillian Dyck, Senator
The Honourable Éric Forest, Senator
The Honourable Josée Forest-Niesing, Senator
The Honourable Brian Francis, Senator
The Honourable Rosa Galvez, Senator
The Honourable Diane Griffin, Senator
The Honourable Nancy Hartling, Senator
The Honourable Mobina Jaffer, Senator
The Honourable Judith Keating, Senator
The Honourable Marty Klyne, Senator
The Honourable Stan Kutcher, Senator
The Honourable Tony Loffreda, Senator
The Honourable Sandra Lovelace Nicholas, Senator
The Honourable Mary Jane McCallum, Senator
The Honourable Marilou McPhedran, Senator
The Honourable Marie-Françoise Mégie, Senator
The Honourable Terry Mercer, Senator

The Honourable Julie Miville-Dechêne, Senator
The Honourable Lucie Moncion, Senator
The Honourable Rosemary Moodie, Senator
The Honourable Jim Munson, Senator
The Honourable Ratna Omidvar, Senator
The Honourable Chantal Petitclerc, Senator
The Honourable Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia, Senator
The Honourable Pierrette Ringuette, Senator
The Honourable Paula Simons, Senator
The Honourable Murray Sinclair, Senator
The Honourable Vernon White, Senator