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The Honourable David Lametti
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Dear Ministers,

We are writing to impress upon you the urgency with which we need to build a truly inclusive Canada by moving immediately to establish a bold new income support program that will lift all Canadians with disabilities out of poverty.

The pandemic has put significant additional pressure on people living with disabilities, many of whom were already struggling to make ends meet before the pandemic. Since then, conversations about how to deploy scarce resources during the pandemic have caused Canadians with disabilities to worry that decision makers will not value their lives equally in the event our health system is overwhelmed.

The long delay in delivering a simple one-time payment to people living with disabilities – committed to in the first wave of the pandemic, but only sent at the beginning of the second – further undermined the confidence of Canadians with disabilities that your government has their back.

It is in this context of uncertainty, challenge and anxiety that Canadians with disabilities have had to confront the difficult issues raised by the Truchon decision, which removes the requirement of ‘foreseeable death’ for medical assistance in dying, and the government’s response to that ruling in Bill C-7.

That bill has limitations, though we recognize that without it the court decision would stand without qualification. In that case, there would be no additional safeguards for people who are facing end of life and are experiencing intolerable suffering, but whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable.

No one should feel pressure to end their life sooner for lack of services and resources. In the context of a medical assistance in dying regime that does not require a reasonably foreseeable death, it is more important than ever that the federal government provide the resources Canadians with disabilities need to live with dignity.



This means properly funding services like home care and palliative care for people across Canada, but it also means ensuring that people living with disabilities have an income that keeps them above the poverty line.

We propose that people living with disabilities who currently qualify for a federal, provincial or territorial disability income support or pension program be transitioned immediately to a federal benefit of \$2,200 per month.

This would put Canadians with disabilities on an equal footing with Canadians receiving the Canada Recovery Benefit, with a small additional amount in recognition of the increased costs that people living with disabilities habitually face. These differential costs were recognized by your government when the NDP negotiated a higher rate for people living with disabilities under the Canada Emergency Student Benefit.

Our intention is that this initiative would leave Canadians with disabilities better off than they are now. While it would supersede existing provincial and territorial income support programs, it should not be understood to replace the other important programs that provinces and territories provide people living with disabilities to assist with the procurement of drugs, equipment, transportation, housing, education and other important supports that people with disabilities need to live well.

Permanent eligibility criteria and an agreement for the provision of supplementary supports should be established in consultation with disability stakeholders, as well as provincial and territorial governments. These consultations, however, should not delay increasing the income of people living with disabilities who have already qualified for income support under the existing rules of a federal, provincial or territorial government.

Such a benefit would satisfy your commitment in the Speech from the Throne to establish "a new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors". It would also offset costs for provincial governments who have been demanding an increase in unconditional federal transfers to cope with the financial impact of the pandemic on their budgets.

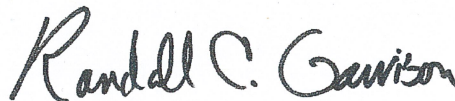
Most importantly, swift action on this proposal would be a sign to Canadians with disabilities that your government will not put them in the impossible position they rightly fear; having to choose either a life of poverty and suffering or a premature death.

New Democrats stand ready to help your government lift Canadians with disabilities out of poverty. We hope you will approach this challenge with the same sense of urgency you have accorded to moving Bill C-7 through the House of Commons.

Yours truly,



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