

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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August 31st, 2020

Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
Via email only:
Ahmed.Hussen@parl.gc.ca

Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
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Honourable Chrystia Freeland
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6
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OPEN LETTER: Federal Support Urgently Needed in Addressing Homelessness

Dear Minister Hussen, Prime Minister Trudeau, and Deputy Prime Minister Freeland,

We are writing to request immediate federal funding to address the short and long-term housing insecurity and the safety needs of people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver. Crucially, those residing in encampments such as Camp KT, a significant proportion of whom are Indigenous, need urgent and sustained relief.

As increasingly high numbers of COVID-19 cases are reported in BC, it is imperative that people's health and safety are protected. Camps and insecure housing present a direct threat to

health, as people cannot socially distance in camps, they cannot safely store their possessions, and they face barriers in accessing basic health and sanitation needs. Housing insecurity and the COVID-19 crisis compound the opioid overdose crisis, with 175 drug overdoses reported by the BC Corners Service in July, making it the third month this year with more than 170 opioid overdose deaths.

Having access to secure housing is a human right, as enshrined by Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Further, Article 21 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* states that Indigenous people have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including housing, sanitation, health and social security. Yet, Indigenous peoples disproportionately experience housing insecurity and homelessness. Although Indigenous peoples make up 2.2% of Vancouver's population, they compose approximately 39% of people experiencing homelessness. The disproportionate rates at which Indigenous peoples experience housing insecurity and homelessness is a direct legacy of colonization and intergenerational trauma and must be addressed with concrete financial supports from a complex multijurisdictional system.

Housing insecurity and encampments such as Camp KT need to be addressed with concrete housing options. Recently, the federal government issued an injunction at the Port at CRAB park, displacing residents without providing them with support to find secure housing and failing to ensure the protection of public health.

We call on the federal government to provide long-term housing options that uphold the safety and wellbeing of people, with particular attention being paid to Indigenous people and their unique needs and socioeconomic conditions. We request that the federal government join the City of Vancouver and Province of British Columbia in immediately drafting a short- and long-term plan to address housing insecurity and homelessness in Vancouver. This plan needs to focus on directing immediate financial relief from federal COVID emergency funds to support safety and long-term housing needs for encampments such as Camp KT, including significant financial commitments to building brick and mortar housing.

We understand that the City of Vancouver has agreed to provide land to address housing needs for homeless and insecurely housed people, and that the Province of British Columbia recently provided financial support in short and long-term housing solutions for residents of the former encampment at Oppenheimer Park. We also note that the Province of British Columbia acquired hotels to support brick and mortar housing during COVID-19, and we expect the federal government to act in a similar fashion to support people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Through *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy*, the federal government committed to halving homelessness by 2027. We would like to remind the federal government of this important commitment, and call on them to work alongside the Province of British Columbia

and the City of Vancouver to uphold the rights of people, including Indigenous people to have secure housing, particularly given the COVID-19 pandemic and opioid crisis.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President



Chief Don Tom
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services Canada
Honourable John Horgan, Premier of BC
Honourable Selina Robinson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Honourable Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Honourable Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Honourable Melanie Mark, MLA for Vancouver- Mount Pleasant
Don Bain, Special Advisor to the Premier
Mayor Kennedy Stewart, City of Vancouver
Vancouver Parks Board members
Don Davies, MP, Vancouver Kingsway
Hedy Fry, MP, Vancouver Centre
Jenny Kwan, MP, Vancouver East
Joyce Murray, MP, Vancouver Quadra
Harjit S. Sajjan, MP, Vancouver South
Patrick Weiler, MP, West Vancouver – Sunshine Coast – Sea to Sky Country
Jonathan Wilkinson, MP, North Vancouver
Jody Wilson-Raybould, MP, Vancouver Granville