



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Scott Duvall

Member of Parliament / Député
Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton Mountain



August 12th, 2021

The Honourable Deb Schulte
Minister of Seniors
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Employment and Social Development Canada
142 Prom. du Portage
Gatineau, QC J8X 2K3

The Honourable Diane Lebovillier, P.C., M.P.
Minister of National Revenue
7th Floor
555 Mackenzie Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1A 0L5

Dear Ministers,

Panicked seniors, in particular those with low-income, in recent days have been reaching out to our offices across the country, telling parliamentarians that they have lost their Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) as result of availing of pandemic supports like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). You should already be aware as we write today in follow up to the letter to you of August 3rd, 2021 on the blatant unfairness of using income from these benefits for calculating their GIS and the inconsistency of doing so across agencies.

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We are urgently bringing to your attention that as a result of their loss of GIS, multiple negative compounding affects are now surfacing and are having devastating effects on our most vulnerable seniors. Simply put, as your Government maintains this policy, seniors are now as a consequence being robbed of other benefits from different levels of government and even companies.

Of the most significantly affected supports are those that will be entirely lost by seniors given that those benefits are *directly* tied to GIS. The Ontario *Guaranteed Annual Income System* (GAINS) payments are provided as a top-up to GIS for only those who collect it. Seniors in St. John's are afforded the *Senior Citizen's Tax Reduction*; a municipal tax reduction of 25% for those 65 years of age or older and in receipt of the supplement. The *Senior's Supplement* is a top-up in the province of British Columbia conditional on receipt of GIS or federal Allowance. The *Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program* (NLPDP) provides financial assistance for the purchase of eligible prescription medications for residents 65 years of age and older who must receive the GIS.

Ministers, as we hope you are aware, this list is by no means exhaustive. In fact, we would expect that your government would have conducted an accounting measure of what other supports would be affected and we ask that you share that with us in your reply.

We are seeing also, cases of those losing GIS being further affected indirectly as result of the supports like CERB and other CRA emergency benefits being considered as income in the way that they currently are. Provincial and municipal rent subsidies are inversely tied to income level. An example is Hamilton's *Access to Housing* (ATH) that maintains the central waiting list for subsidized housing in the city which is rent-geared-to-income. Seniors have seen rises in rents.

Our offices have been made aware that seniors are even losing out on significant discounts from companies including that on reoccurring billing options from service providers for those who can provide proof of GIS.

What is a most troubling scenario that some are facing in all of this, due to what can only be described as ill-conceived policy, is the loss of GIS due to income a citizen received via the CERB but where eligibility was not met, and where recipients were not able to repay before December 31, 2020. **While they are losing *both* CERB and GIS, we are having to report back to those seniors for whom we are advocating, that the government, through its agencies, are saying that there is nothing they can do for them.**

We are hearing from legal services clinics and other agencies across Ontario who are seeing seniors who have lost their GIS as a result of CERB, some of which will have to make repayments. **These organizations are saying that the result is devastating and are reporting that seniors had no understanding that taking these pandemic supports would have had any impact on their GIS. There are accounts of some low-income seniors who cannot pay their rent and will be facing eviction.**

Seniors, and Members of Parliament on their behalf, have been searching for answers on these concerns and uncertainties for months now with no clear answers being provided by your government. Therein lies two troubling aspects of your government's handling of this. Firstly, it has recently come to our attention that documents show that your government was aware of how CERB and GIS would interact as far back as early 2020. Not only were these answers not made available to seniors, even after being sought, but the responsibility should have been incumbent on your government to advertise to seniors

that these consequences would come, *before* they decided to take the pandemic benefits that you offered them. Secondly, the answers that we are now finally getting, in addition to being devastating in form, are inconsistent based on source. Presently your Ministerial offices are giving answers that differ from each other and also differ from what your agencies are providing to Canadians.

We are hearing that Service Canada has given instructions that emergency benefits paid through Service Canada (EI ERB) are exempt for the purposes of GIS eligibility, but *not* those paid from CRA. Within the text of the BILL C-13 (An Act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19), it was clear that eligibility for the CERB was tied to being a 'worker'. It's troubling that government has made this distinction based on the source of the emergency benefits.

Ministers, to allow this to stand, where seniors as a result of accepting pandemic assistance, lose GIS and the many supports tied to it, on which they depend for survival, is simply wrong. We are calling on you to acknowledge this mistake and to immediately reassure seniors that you will promptly fix it.

While there may be a variety of administrative ways of doing it, the solution here is for Government to make a change that ensures that these benefits are not counted as income for the purposes of GIS. **If your government determines that this fix requires legislative changes, we are prepared to return to Parliament.**

Given the rapidly increasing number of seniors who are reaching out, and an intensifying panic they are experiencing, I urge and trust that you will provide a swift reply.

Regards,



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