

DANIEL BLAIKIE MP

Elmwood–Transcona

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

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

August 3, 2021

Dear Ministers,

I am writing to draw your attention to a problem in the conduct of your departments that is putting some of Canada's poorest seniors in serious distress.

As you know, Canada's lowest-income seniors can receive additional financial support through the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). Nevertheless, the current GIS rate is not enough to keep them out of a life of poverty. Seniors receiving the GIS who are both willing and able may earn some employment income to supplement this inadequate pension.

Many seniors who were working to supplement their GIS prior to the pandemic were eligible and applied for emergency benefits when the pandemic robbed them of their employment. They paid taxes on this benefit income, but it appears that the income is now being used against them in the calculation of their GIS benefit for this year.

The benefit income was obviously extraordinary and cannot be used as a fair benchmark for calculating their GIS entitlement for this year. GIS recipients already struggle to make ends meet. Denying them the GIS, or severely reducing it, as a result of last year's emergency benefits is not only unfair, but will make it impossible for some of them to make rent. In some cases they will also lose provincial benefits they rely on to make ends meet. The point of the



emergency benefits was to prevent evictions and keep food on the table, not to merely delay homelessness and hunger.

Further compounding the problem and outrage at this situation is the fact that it appears GIS recipients who applied for emergency benefits under the Service Canada stream are not having their GIS impacted by their benefit income, while those who applied under the Canada Revenue Agency stream are. New Democrat offices across the country are hearing about it from seniors who applied for emergency benefits through the CRA. If one of your departments can recognize the injustice of this punitive policy, surely those dealing with another department deserve similar treatment.

The upshot is that many seniors are being put in a desperate situation based on a confusing internal distinction between emergency benefits that has never been clear to the public. This is not the first time the needs of your own bureaucracies have trumped the needs of those Canadians your departments are meant to serve.

Unfortunately, as our offices follow up on these urgent concerns, we are being passed from one department to another and back again. Swift action is required to fix this problem before our seniors start receiving eviction notices. Leadership and political will are the necessary ingredients for a solution. Passing the buck will not get the job done.

I am writing to you all in order to find out who among you will take responsibility for this mess and demand a prompt solution. I would be happy to make myself available for a meeting to provide any clarification you need about how this is impacting our seniors and discuss solutions to the problem.

I look forward to your prompt reply.

Yours truly,



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