

December 13, 2019

The Honourable Maryam Monsef
Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A2

Dear Honourable Minister Monsef,

Congratulations on your election to the House of Commons and your appointment as Minister for Women and Gender Equality.

I write to you on behalf of Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights (formerly Planned Parenthood Canada), a progressive, pro-choice charitable organization committed to advancing and upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights in Canada and globally.

Over the last few months, we have felt encouraged to see reference to crucial sexual and reproductive health and rights issues in the new government's electoral commitments. We are specifically pleased to see references in your mandate letter to: move forward with the creation of a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and sustaining funding to women's organizations.

As you know, sexual and reproductive health and rights are central to the bodily autonomy, agency, and empowerment, in particular of women, trans men, and other gender minorities. As such, gender equality cannot be achieved until all people can decide freely on all matters relating to their sexuality, gender and reproduction.

In promoting gender equity, we urge you to take action on two key issues: **empowering individuals with positive information regarding their gender, sexuality, and reproduction** and **addressing stigma and discrimination experienced by individuals on these grounds**. With these fundamental principals in mind, we urge you to take immediate action on the following issues.

- Ensure stable, predictable, flexible, multi-year core funding for feminist civil society organizations that respect and uphold our reproductive and sexual rights.

Strengthening a diverse and robust feminist movement in Canada must be a central goal of the Department for Women and Gender Equality. We encourage the department to scale up its support for organizations that represent the independent interests of an intersectional feminist movement. No comprehensive or national strategy towards gender equality or transformative feminism can be achieved in a context of financial scarcity, especially given our need, as feminists, to respect and promote labour rights, fair wages, and diverse, equity minded hiring practices.

- Champion comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) across federal ministries collaboration with provinces, recognizing the role CSE plays in reducing gender-based violence and realizing gender equality.

The sexuality education young people in Canada receive is severely lacking, if they receive any at all. It is not in line with international standards, is outdated, is not comprehensive, is not monitored or evaluated to guarantee quality, and is taught by educators with low to no support. We therefore urge you to: a) lead the development of a federally funded public strategy to promote awareness of comprehensive sexuality education that aligns with the new *Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education*, b) invest in the training of professional sexual health educators, and c) support the collection of data on a robust set of sexual health indicators.



- Work with relevant Ministries and provincial and territorial governments to realize reproductive justice throughout Canada.

This includes taking immediate action to: a) promote equitable access to and widespread availability of abortion services, including medical abortion b) advocate for the creation of a national universal and public childcare strategy, c) take steps to regulate conscientious objection in line with international best practice, d) support systemic remedies to prevent the recurrence of forced and coerced sterilization, with special consideration for Indigenous and disabled women, and e) support efforts to intervene with provinces and territories that uphold any barriers to access abortion, contraceptives, and other sexual and reproductive health services including the passage of legislation that violates reproductive and sexual rights.

- Meaningfully engage persons of diverse gender identities and expressions, and allied organizations, in the design, development and implementation of all laws, policies, and programs that affect their lives, and
- Work with the Ministry of Justice to urgently repeal the Protection of Exploited Persons and Communities Act, which continues to threaten the health and safety of sex workers, and meaningfully engage and consult with sex workers regarding any policy or law that effects them.

We look forward to working with you to implement these and other reforms in Canada and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the above in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Sandeep Prasad, Executive Director, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights

sandeep@sexualhealthandrights.ca, 613-241-4474 x3

CC: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.