



The Honourable Bill Morneau
Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

April 30, 2019

Re: Support for Right to Housing Amendments to Bill C-97 and the National Housing Strategy Act

Dear Minister Morneau,

In [Bill C-97](#) (Budget Implementation Act, 2019) tabled Monday, April 8, the government took a major step forward on legislating housing rights by including a commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing for the first time in Canada's history. The National Housing Strategy Act reflects many of the recommendations made in an open letter signed by over 1,100 individuals and organizations from across Canada, including United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC).

UWCC was a founding partner in the National Housing Collaborative, the alliance of nonprofit and private housing associations and major foundations focused on developing transformative, durable and innovative policy solutions to support a strong, vibrant housing system. We welcomed the National Housing Strategy as a bold step to address housing affordability in Canada.

UWCC believes the government got a lot right in the National Housing Strategy Act. We particularly recognize the stated commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing consistent with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the creation of an independent Housing Advocate; the establishment of a National Housing Council with explicit inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness and inadequate housing, and; to ensuring participation of affected communities.

However, as currently written, the National Housing Strategy Act lacks essential elements of a workable, human rights accountability framework. Some additional elements need to be added for the legislation to implement an effective rights-based approach as promised when the National Housing Strategy was introduced in November 2017, and as required to bring Canada in line with international human rights standards.

We are asking for your support to ask the government to make a few simple but critical amendments to the National Housing Strategy Act when the act goes to committee for review. Specifically, we are asking for amendments to Bill C-97, so that the National Housing Strategy Act:

- establishes a monitoring role for the Housing Council, that does not simply provide advice, but tracks progress on implementing the progressive realization of the right to housing;
- mandates the Housing Advocate to receive and investigate petitions identifying systemic housing rights issues, assess compliance with the housing policy commitment, and make specific recommendations to the Minister that the Minister must respond to;
- establishes a procedure for the Housing Advocate to refer important systemic housing rights issues to public hearings before a three-person panel drawn from the Housing Council, ensuring affected groups have a voice, and that the panel's recommendations will be considered by the Minister; and,
- requires distinction-based housing strategies that identify and address the barriers, needs and rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as an urban and rural Indigenous housing strategy, co-developed with urban and rural Indigenous organizations, consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

None of these necessary amendments alter the scope and principle of the legislation and none require any public expenditure that is not already provided for in the legislation. The amendments are necessary to provide greater clarity and to bring the roles of the Housing Council and the Housing Advocate in line with the purpose of the legislation and the commitment to a rights-based approach based on international human rights.

Legislation implementing a rights-based national housing strategy provides an historic opportunity for the federal government to address, as a priority, a critical human rights issue at home and at the same time to provide leadership in human rights internationally. This government is the first in Canada's history to introduce legislation recognizing the right to housing and it is critical that we get this right.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to this important issue. Please be assured that UWCC remains committed to working with you in partnership to build and support a strong and vibrant housing system for all Canadians.

Sincerely,



Dan Clement
President and CEO |
Président-directeur général