The Hon. Kamal Khera, Minister for Seniors

The Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

February 22, 2022

Dear Minister Khera and Minister Freeland,

We are writing to urge you to take action to keep Canada’s seniors from falling into deep poverty. Canada is currently experiencing a high rate of inflation. Last month, the consumer price index rose to 5.1%, the highest rate of inflation Canada has experienced in over 30 years. Yet the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security benefits have only been increased by 1% for 2022. For seniors dependent on these programs, this leaves a widening gap between the cost of their basic needs and the income they have to meet those needs. In 2021, more seniors than ever were forced to turn on food banks, making them the fastest growing demographic among food bank users. Without intervention, this trend will become even worse in 2022. We urge you to index the CPP and OAS to inflation, and in the meantime to offer a one-time top-up to CPP and OAS recipients, that could be taxed back from those in the highest income levels.

We are also concerned about the timeline for reimbursement for low-income seniors who had their Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments reduced or eliminated because they received pandemic benefits (CERB). Many are hungry, struggling to pay for medications and rent; some have lost their eligibility for housing benefits; some have even become homeless. These seniors are experiencing increased stress and mental health challenges as a result of the hardship this has caused. We know your government has already earmarked funds to reimburse these most vulnerable seniors, but it will not be paid out until April 2022, unless those “in dire financial need” apply earlier. By definition, seniors who are eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement *are* in dire financial need. They should not have to make a special application to Service Canada in order to keep from being evicted. We join Campaign 2000 in calling on you to

* immediately implement a $100 million housing fund for pandemic clawback victims using a very low-barrier distribution method, to help keep seniors housed and mitigate evictions; and
* immediately provide an interim down payment of $2,500 to all GIS clawback victims with losses of at least this amount.

Seniors are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. They deserve our respect and care, and protection against falling into deep poverty. We urge you to implement these recommendations.

Yours faithfully,

Elin Goulden, Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant, Diocese of Toronto

The Rev. Canon Maggie Helwig, Chair, Social Justice & Advocacy Committee, Diocese of Toronto

The Rev. Canon Andrea Budgey, Chair, Poverty Reduction Subcommittee, Diocese of Toronto