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AN OPEN LETTER SUPPORTING SERVICE CANADA'S DECISION TO ASK FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES TO USE GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE WHEN ADDRESSING THE PUBLIC

Monday, March 26, 2018

Dear Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Services,

**Honorary
Advisory Board**

The Honourable
Louise Arbour

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Salah Bachir

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The Honourable
Linda Frum

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Jaime Watt

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust is wholeheartedly in support of the recent move made by Service Canada asking frontline employees to use more inclusive and gender-neutral language. This move seeks to secure greater fulfillment of human rights in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The change towards using inclusive, gender-neutral language aligns with Canada's existing domestic human rights obligations, including to guarantee the right to security of the person, equality rights, the right to be free from discrimination (which includes discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression).

When done properly – with awareness training and education around the use of gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language – the use of gender-neutral and gender inclusive language will help frontline employees avoid portraying a perceived bias towards a particular sex or gender. This is quite significant as misgendering trans, intersex and non-binary people can have severe consequences on mental health.

It is important to note that these small steps have astronomical positive impacts in the lives of trans, intersex and non-binary people across Canada. For example, less experience with transphobia (including misgendering) has 66% relative risk reduction in suicide attempts. Moreover, high social support reduces suicidality by 49%, and even having one or more pieces of ID reflecting gender identity can reduce suicidality. For a portion of the population that is already faced with high suicide rates use of the gender-neutral terminology on the frontlines at Service Canada is a significant acknowledgement.

The Government of Canada has a responsibility to ensure that its policies, programs and guidelines protect and fulfil human rights. This includes acknowledging sexuality, gender identity and gender expression of the individual. Egale Canada welcomes the steps taken to ensure that the rights of all people in Canada are protected and call on all political parties to support these changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Helen Kennedy", written in a cursive style.

Helen Kennedy
Executive Director

Egale works to improve the lives of LGBTQ2S people in Canada and to enhance the global response to LGBTQ2S issues. Egale will achieve this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education and community engagement.

Égale travaille à améliorer la vie des personnes LGBTQ+ en éclairant l'élaboration des politiques publiques, en inspirant le changement culturel et en promouvant les droits de la personne et l'inclusion grâce à la recherche, à l'éducation et à la mobilisation communautaire.