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December 16, 2019

VIA EMAIL: Deb.Schulte@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Deb Schulte

Minister of Seniors
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

To The Honourable Deb Schulte:

Re: Ministerial Mandate Letter

Egale Canada would like to extend our sincere congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Seniors. We believe that this Ministry has tremendous potential to positively impact LGBTQI2S seniors in Canada.

Egale Canada is the only national LGBTQI2S organization in Canada. We work to improve the lives of LGBTQI2S persons and to enhance the global response to LGBTQI2S issues by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, and community engagement.

We are encouraged by this Government's commitment to work with the LGBTQI2S community. As I am sure you are aware, in November 2017, the Prime Minister formally apologized for nearly four decades of "systemic oppression, criminalization, and violence"¹ against the LGBTQI2S community in Canada. During this apology, we were relieved to hear that the Prime Minister understands that "there is still much work to do"² to eradicate LGBTQI2S discrimination in Canada.

We applaud the Prime Minister's decision to disclose *mandate letters* to the public. We agree that by doing so, this Government has taken steps to ensure "the most open and accessible government possible."³ We have read your *mandate letter* and are encouraged by the following priorities that have been identified by the Prime Minister:

¹ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, "Remarks by Prime Minister Trudeau to apologize to LGBTQ2 Canadians", 28 November 2017, online: Government of Canada <<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2017/11/28/remarks-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-apologize-lgbtq2-canadians>>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, "Prime Minister releases new ministerial mandate letters", 28 August 2018, online: Government of Canada <<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2018/08/28/prime-minister-releases-new-ministerial-mandate-letters>>.



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- i. Work with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development on initiatives to promote healthy aging. This includes learning from and building on federally supported programs that have proven successful in supporting the needs of seniors and their families, as well as ensuring the Government's investments in home care, palliative care and community care are well coordinated and are having the intended impacts.
- ii. Support the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to ensure seniors' housing needs are reflected in the implementation of the National Housing Strategy.
- iii. Support the Minister of Health in the delivery of health care commitments of relevance to seniors and aging, including ensuring that every Canadian has access to a family doctor or a primary health care team and setting national standards for access to mental health services.

We believe that human rights protection requires constant and diligent supervision, and we feel responsible to ensure that the Government of Canada does not waver from the commitments made in November 2017, nor those stated in your *mandate letter*.

We welcome the initiatives undertaken by the Government of Canada to promote initiatives to support equitable housing strategies and healthy aging for seniors. Though, we are deeply concerned that your portfolio does not address the unique needs of LGBTQI2S seniors in Canada. It is widely documented that LGBTQI2S seniors experience discrimination and mistreatment in healthcare systems and long-term care.⁴ It is imperative that these institutions are equipped with the tools needed to ensure that they can provide care in a manner that is inclusive and sensitive to the unique needs of LGBTQI2S persons.

We trust that the Ministry of Seniors is aware of the lingering social and cultural exclusion that has impacted the ability of LGBTQI2S seniors to navigate social programming, healthcare systems, and long-term care. In a 2018 study in the *Canadian Journal of on Aging*, Wilson, Kortes-Miller, and Stinchcombe, described the obstacles faced by LGBTQI2S seniors in the context of long-term care:

⁴ See for example, Employment and Social Development Canada, "Social isolation of seniors: A focus on LGBTQ seniors in Canada", *Government of Canada*, 19 November 2018, online: Government of Canada <<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-lgbtq.html>>.



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Fears about homophobia, stigma, and discrimination were also reflected in the significant discussions about the lack of inclusiveness in the health care system as a whole, but particularly within long-term care. Almost universally, participants described the lack of inclusivity as a barrier to receiving quality care at the end-of-life.

[...]

Older LGBT adults have unique needs and expectations when it comes to aging and end-of-life. In particular, fears around staying out of the closet and around institutionalization, coupled with the need for different social support networks, are salient. There is a demographic and moral imperative to respond to the needs of LGBT older adults to ensure inclusive health systems that respond to aging and facilitate good end-of-life experiences [emphasis added].⁵

Egale Canada has developed a **National Action Plan** for a more LGBTQI2S inclusive Canada. We urge the Ministry of Seniors to consider some of the **recommendations** contained in this plan, namely:

- **Fund** programs that provide cultural competency training to care providers about issues specifically faced by LGBTQI2S seniors living with dementia, as part of the federal commitment to improve ways to address dementia.
- **Ensure** further education of culturally competent and LGBTQI2S-friendly services, for the consistency of culturally inclusive approach for LGBTQI2S seniors.
- **Support** further research to evaluate the needs of LGBTQI2S seniors.
- **Support** low income seniors and link with existing local LGBTQI2S organizations with outreach and support for programs such as access to LGBTQI2S friendly home care, end of life planning, cultural competency training for service providers, and financial and legal support. This can coincide with the federal commitment to work with the provinces and territories in the coordination of programs.

⁵ Kimberly Wilson, Katherine Kortez-Miller, and Arne Stinchcombe, "Staying out of the Closet: Older Adults' Hopes and Fears in Considering End-of-Life", *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 37:1, 2018, online: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/C3DD0D6B5BD8C0E0368E04B11F67C029/S0714980817000514a.pdf/staying_out_of_the_closet_lgbt_older_adults_hopes_and_fears_in_considering_endoflife.pdf>



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Egale Canada has developed an expertise on LGBTQI2S human rights issues. Since our inception in 1986, we have intervened in 13 applications before the Supreme Court of Canada and more than 25 equality-seeking legal proceedings in lower courts.

We believe strongly in equality and inclusivity for all Canadians, and would kindly request to be consulted on the LGBTQI2S issues that fall within your mandate as Minister of Seniors.

Please take this letter as a formal request for a meeting with you, and members of your Ministry, to discuss Egale Canada's National Action Plan for a more LGBTQI2S inclusive Canada.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Kennedy'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Kennedy
Executive Director
Egale Canada