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Open Letter: Egale Canada Calls on the Ministry of Transport to Implement Gender-Neutral Screening at Airports in Canada

March 7th, 2023

To the Honourable Omar Alghabra, P.C., M.P., Minister of Transport:

As Canada's national organization for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, and intersex (2SLGBTQI) people, Egale Canada is deeply concerned by reports of systemic discrimination against Two-Spirit, trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming (2STNBGN) passengers in Canada's airports. In particular, gendered algorithms used in full body scans have resulted in unacceptable infringements of the safety and dignity of 2STNBGN passengers.

CATSA's policy on physical searches of trans passengers was developed in consultation with Egale and implemented in 2017. At that time, we called on CATSA to train airport security staff to ensure that 2STNBGN airline passengers are treated with dignity and respect. That training is still lacking and there is still a great deal of work to be done. We are calling on the Ministry of Transport to continue the work of advancing equity by eliminating all situations where personnel or software at airports make assumptions about people's genders and bodies.

At present, the algorithms used in full body scanners are designed with the assumption that there will be less tissue on the chest of a person whom a security officer has deemed male, and less tissue around the groin of a person whom a security officer has deemed female. When passengers for whom this does not hold true pass through the scanners, the scanners report a 'flag' around these highly sensitive areas, prompting physical searches that can be invasive, humiliating, and traumatic.

In response to this intolerable situation, the US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) announced in March of 2022 that it would be working with the manufacturers of its full body scanners to install new gender-neutral algorithms. It is past time for Canada to follow suit. It is impossible to determine a



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person's gender or the details of their anatomy with a glance and it is absurd and discriminatory to attempt to do so. Security personnel must be fully trained and qualified to treat 2STNBGN people with dignity and respect.

As I am sure you are aware, the rights of 2STNBGN people around the world are increasingly coming under attack. Canada must continue to act as a leader in implementing inclusive policies, including at airports. Egale stands with the 2STNBGN community in demanding gender-neutral screening as an essential part of the right to safety and dignity at airports in Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Kennedy'.

Helen Kennedy
Executive Director
Egale Canada