

December 22, 2015

The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1L1

Dear Minister McCallum,

We as undersigned Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) contracted resettlement assistance program (RAP) service providing organizations (SPOs) are pleased to be supporting the federal governments' humanitarian goal of resettling 25,000 Syrian government assisted refugees (GARs) over the next 13 months. We understand and applaud the decision that the Syrian GAR target is over and above GAR targets from other world regions. We also want to acknowledge your leadership in:

- Restoring Interim Federal Health for Privately Sponsored Refugees;
- Expediting approval of additional Resettlement Assistance Funding;
- Waiving the transportation loan for Syrian GARs and PSRs; and,
- Facilitating a more reasonable timeline for arrivals.

We are actively working around the clock, seven days a week with Department staff to ensure the federal governments' ambitious target is reached successfully. We are also thrilled to see the positive public and private sector response that this plan has garnered and the enthusiasm on the part of Canadians to engage in welcoming and supporting these refugee newcomers.

Many of our twenty three (23) RAP SPO's colleagues including our thirteen (13) Quebec colleagues have been providing front-line services to government assisted refugees for over 30 years, and several of us are also Sponsorship Agreement Holders directly involved in assisting privately sponsored refugees, as well as the individuals and groups that support them. As such, we have extensive experience and expertise in addressing the needs of refugees and their host communities, and are national and international leaders in the field of settlement and integration.

Despite the goodwill among Canadians and the many collaborative initiatives being established with various levels of government, service providers, the private sector, and communities across the country, we are gravely concerned that this national plan will ultimately fail if we do not address and resolve the critical issue of securing permanent housing options under current shelter rates.

While we appreciate the efforts of the Federal Government to assist refugee individuals and families as they establish themselves in Canada, however, the fact remains that the current

housing allowances that mirror provincial income support rates (e.g. on average \$375 for individuals and \$695 for families of four) are far too low to access adequate long term housing regardless of city or province in Canada. As a result, many refugees are forced to utilize their child tax benefits and food allowances to cover their rent expenses. The impact are emerging refugee newcomer populations who have little or no financial footing and who are forced to add monetary constraints, poor housing situations, and fear of at risk homelessness to the long list of complex challenges they must contend with as they transition into their new lives in Canada.

Throughout our decades of research and service provision, we have come to recognize that there are a myriad of factors that are essential for the successful settlement and integration of refugees. One key factor is the provision of safe, affordable and sustainable long-term housing. For refugee individuals and families who have fled traumatic conditions in their countries of origin or asylum, a suitable home not only provides necessary shelter but also an opportunity to become long-term members of a neighbourhood. Housing location also impacts children's integration into their school community and away from undesirable activities. Quality and affordable housing provides a sense of security, permanence, and belonging -- a refuge where refugee newcomers can process their experiences, tend to their emotional and physical needs, and begin to rebuild their lives.

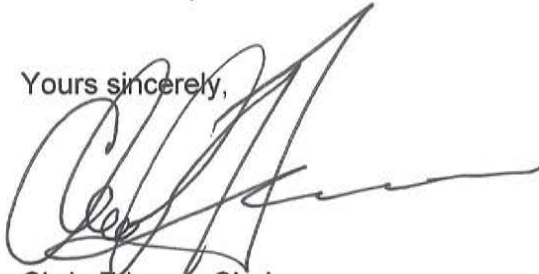
During your recent tour across the country, one request was repeatedly made by mayors, provincial sector leaders, community members, and service providers. This request was for the Federal Government to revisit the issue of the monthly housing allowance that reflect provincial income support rates. Although many private parties within the housing sector have stepped forward to assist with the provision of affordable accommodations, a more sustainable and widespread solution is needed. Our straight forward solution is to increase the RAP housing allowances and/or supplement. This would mean disconnecting shelter rates from provincial government shelter allowances. If there is no change in the housing allowance then the Department needs to anticipate increase cost and length of stay in temporary accommodation. We are also aware that our implementation and achievement of this plan and its impacts on local communities will be under intense public and media scrutiny. Both the federal and provincial government's need to be aware and be prepared for negative media stories and unwanted public attention as a result of questionable secured permanent housing dictated by current shelter rates.

We also want to applaud your leadership in engaging Corporate Canada and the \$50 million fund raising goal through the Community Foundations of Canada. We have an invaluable opportunity to engage Corporate Canada in various ways to augment newcomer supports and needs. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff in defining creative ways that Corporate Canada can enhance current program areas and challenges for the betterment of all refugee newcomers.

In conclusion, we strongly respect and support the Federal Governments' commitment to bring 25,000 Syrian government assisted refugees to our country, and we are eager to see the effort, dedication, and collaborations that will bring this plan to fruition. We urge you to address the one

critical issue of shelter allowances and/or a national housing supplement(s) that will ensure that Syrian and other resettled refugees have the best possible start in this country. We appreciate your time and attention to this critical issue. If you should have questions regarding the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Friesen, Chair,

CISSA-ACSEI on behalf of the following RAP SPO's:

British Columbia:

Patricia Woroch, CEO, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC

Alberta:

Fariborz Birjandian, Executive Director, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, Calgary, AB
Alice Colak, Program Director, Catholic Social Services, Edmonton and Red Deer, AB
Antonio Samayoa, Executive Director, SAAMIS Immigration Services Association, Medicine Hat, AB
Bozana Sljuka, Manager, Settlement Program, Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services, Lethbridge, AB

Saskatchewan:

Darcy Dietrich, Executive Director, Regina Open Door Society, Regina, SK
Ali Abukar, Executive Director, Saskatoon Open Door Society, Saskatoon, SK
Donna Brooks, Executive Director, YWCA-Prince Albert, Prince Albert, SK
Stephanie Palmer, Executive Director, Moose Jaw Multicultural Council, Moose Jaw, SK

Manitoba:

Rita Chahal, Executive Director, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Winnipeg, MB
Bintou Sacko, La Société Franco-Manitobaine/Accueil Francophone, Winnipeg, MB

Ontario:

Carl Nicholson, Executive Director, Catholic Immigration Centre, Ottawa, ON
Thomas Kwok, Manager, Immigrant Reception & Information Services / Malton Neighbourhood Services, Mississauga, ON
Mario Calla, Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services, Toronto, ON
Valerian Marochko, Executive Director, London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, London, ON

Lynne Griffiths, Acting Program Director, Kitchener-Waterloo Reception House, Kitchener, ON
 Kathleen Thomas, Executive Director, Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, Windsor, ON
 Daljit Garry, Executive Director, Wesley Urban Ministry, Hamilton, ON

Québec:

Dominique Lachance, Directrice, Centre multiethnique du Québec, Québec, QC
 Ivan Suaza, Directeur, Service d'accueil des nouveaux arrivants (SANA), Trois-Rivières, QC
 Helene Durochers, Directrice, Comité d'accueil international des Bois-Francs, Victoriaville, QC
 Darryl Bamabo, Directeur, Regroupement interculturel de Drummond (RID), Drummondville, QC
 Mercedes Orellana, Directrice, Service d'aide aux néo-Canadiens (SANC), Sherbrooke, QC
 Lida Aghasi, Directrice, Centre social d'aide aux immigrants (CSAI), Montréal, QC
 Bato Redzovic, Directeur, Accueil parrainage Outaouais, Gatineau, QC
 Danae Savides, Directrice, Carrefour d'intercultures de Laval, Laval, QC
 Josée Leclerc, Coordonnatrice, Comité régional d'éducation pour le développement international de Lanaudière (CRÉDIL), Joliette, QC
 Line Chaloux, Directrice, Centre d'orientation et de formation favorisant les relations ethniques traditionnelles (C.O.F.F.R.E.T), Saint-Jérôme, QC
 Jubillée Larraguibel, Directrice, Maison de la famille des Maskoutains, Saint-Hyacinthe, QC
 Noureddine Belhocine, Directeur, Maison internationale de la Rive-Sud (MIRS), Brossard, QC
 Joanne Ouellette, Directrice, Solidarité ethnique régionale de la Yamaska (SERY), Granby, QC

New Brunswick:

Lisa Bamford, Executive Director, Multicultural Association of Fredericton, NB
 Jill Kelilher, YM/YWCA, Saint John, NB
 Jean-Pierre Alexandre, Executive Director, Multicultural Association of Greater Moncton, Moncton, NB

Nova Scotia:

Claudette Legault, Director of Programs & Services, Immigrant Settlement & Integration Services, Halifax, NS

Prince Edward Island:

Craig Mackie, Executive Director, PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada, Charlottetown, PEI

Newfoundland and Labrador:

Megan Morris, Executive Director, Association for New Canadians, St. John's, NF

cc:

Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Jobs, Tourism & Skills Training, Province of British Columbia

Honourable Lori Sigurdson, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training & Labour, Province of Alberta



Honourable Rob Norris, Minister of Advanced Education, Employment & Immigration, Province of Saskatchewan

Honourable Erna Braun, Minister of Labour & Immigration, Province of Manitoba

Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration & International Trade, Province of Ontario

Honourable Kathleen Weil, Minister of Immigration, Diversity & Inclusiveness, Province of Québec

Honourable Francine Landry, Minister of Post Secondary Education, Training & Labour, Province of New Brunswick

Honourable Lena Metlege Diab, Attorney General, Minister of Immigration & Justice, Province of Nova Scotia

Honourable J. Heath MacDonald, Minister of Economic Development & Tourism, Province of Prince Edward Island

Honourable Gerry Bryne, Minister of Advanced Education & Skills, Province of Newfoundland & Labrador