



**Community Homes
Action Group**

**A HOME IS A HUMAN RIGHT
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

OPEN LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Karen Casey,
Minister of Finance and Treasury Board,
Department of Finance and Treasury Board,
P.O. Box 187,
Halifax, N.S. B3J 2N3

January 4, 2020

Dear Ms. Casey,

As we approach the 2020-21 provincial budget, I write on behalf of Nova Scotians with developmental disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families to urge the government to fulfill its commitments to create community based, person-centred supported housing capacity for our population. This is the central goal of the Roadmap for Transforming the Nova Scotia Services to Persons with Disabilities Program – aptly titled *CHOICE, EQUALITY AND GOOD LIVES IN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES*. This implementation plan to transform the Disability Support Program was jointly developed in 2013 by community and government to address and eliminate the growing waitlists for community-based homes and Nova Scotia’s disproportionate reliance on institutional facilities. The Roadmap was a response to Canada’s ratification in 2010 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UN Convention recognizes “the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community” with “access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services...necessary to support living and inclusion in the community”.

The current government adopted the Roadmap Report and a 10-year time frame for significantly increasing community-based supported living options while decreasing reliance on large institutions. So far, however, the allocation of resources from government needed to create community capacity has been woefully inadequate. Wait lists for services continue to grow – from 1100 in 2015 to 1300 in 2017 to nearly 1500 last year. This is because the badly needed investments by government have not been forthcoming.

The bulk of the wait list is made up of those seeking a small-option home (four or fewer residents) or independent living support. In response to the need for hundreds of small-option (community) placements, the government has so far committed to only eight small-option homes across the province to serve about 30 residents. The first four of those homes were promised in the 2016 budget, a second batch of four was announced in budget 2017 and the same eight-home package was reiterated in budget 2018. The budget of 2019 included no money for new homes.

The absence of any new investment in community home capacity last year was doubly disappointing in light of the Emerald Hall Human Rights Inquiry that had weeks earlier found the government had clearly violated the human rights of three Nova Scotians for many years by failing to provide the resources necessary to allow them to live in community, not locked away.

The lack of action on this file has reached crisis proportion.

In April of 2019, a rally and press conference at Province House and an open letter to the Premier called on the government to fulfill its promises to meet its ten-year time frame for emptying institutions, clearing waitlists and creating community homes capacity by 2023. Over 100 organizations and 40 individuals signed this landmark letter. I have attached it for your benefit.

In May, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities visited Canada (and Halifax) and reported we still lag far behind in the implementation of its obligations under the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In April and October, Autism Nova Scotia hosted two Supported Housing conferences to draw attention to this steadily worsening problem with supportive housing – and talk solutions. Hundreds of family members, first voice, advocates, service deliverers, civil servants came together to share their knowledge, experience and commitment to creating the kinds of supported housing choices needed.

But it will not happen without the significant financial investment promised by the provincial government to address this crisis. Eight homes are clearly not enough.

In 2018, Community Homes Action Group (CHAG) called for an investment in at least 25 new small option homes a year over the next three years. We reiterate that request today. This would mean an increase of 75 new supportive living homes across the province within 3 years thereby meeting the needs of up to 300 people with disabilities currently on waitlists and living in inappropriate environments.

Building on the growing needs in our province, we also request that the Independent Living Support (ILS) program see a significant investment in this year's budget to support the more than 400 people currently on the waitlist.

These two financial commitments would send a clear message that government is serious about their promises made in the 2013 Roadmap to Nova Scotians with disabilities and their families. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the equal rights of all persons with disabilities to live good lives in inclusive communities. It is time for Nova Scotia to also commit fully to meeting that goal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Lill', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Wendy Lill,
Chair, Community Homes Action Group

Cc: Kelly Regan, Minister of Community Services
cc. Maria Medioli, Executive Director, DSP
cc. Nova Scotia Association of Community Living
cc. Disability Rights Coalition
cc. Independent Living Nova Scotia
cc. Dartmouth Adult Services Centre
cc. Autism Nova Scotia
cc. Club Inclusion
cc. Nova Scotia MLAs
cc. Nova Scotia Residential Agencies Association

April 4, 2019

The Honourable Stephen McNeil
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Premier McNeil:

We, the Disability Rights Coalition and our allies, want to bring to your attention the Province's widespread and decades-long unfairness towards persons with disabilities in the provision of community-based supports, and to ask for your public commitment to make immediate changes to right this large scale human rights injustice. The Province's denial of basic human rights to people with disabilities affects all of us, and equality seekers are united in calling on you to put an end to this historic segregation, isolation and discrimination.

In his March 4th, 2019 decision, Walter Thompson Q.C. sitting as a Human Rights Board of Inquiry, found that the Province had been discriminating for many years against three people who had been locked up unnecessarily in a psychiatric hospital, Quest and the Community Transition Program (CTP) even though everyone involved agreed that they could have been supported to live in the community, and found the Province responsible for "indifference that really, after time, becomes contempt".

However, the Board of Inquiry declined to rule on the many hundreds of other cases where people with disabilities are similarly unnecessarily institutionalized for years—and sometime decades—even though the Province acknowledges that they have *already* been assessed and determined to be eligible for social services and capable of living in the community.

The disregard shown by the Province to the wishes of these individuals also amounts to contempt. Lynn Hartwell, a Deputy Minister in your government, testified to the harm and disadvantage faced by people with disabilities as a result of the Province's inaction since the 1990s, and acknowledged the undisputed benefits of community integration. At the same time, the Province continues to spend millions each year unnecessarily institutionalising people with disabilities in psychiatric hospitals, regional rehabilitation centers and other facilities.

The Board's decision contemplates that those on the Province's wait list of over 1,500 people should file their own human rights complaint in order to have their human rights vindicated.

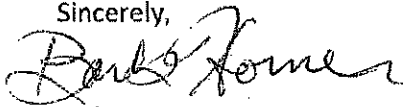
Rather than engage in an absurd scenario in which hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people with disabilities or their loved ones need to file human rights complaints tying up the legal system, now more than ever, we look to our democratically elected government to take action to fix what it admits is a broken and inequitable system for persons with disabilities. Elderly or ill parents are in crisis as they struggle to ensure their adult children with disabilities receive choice, inclusion and equality in their day to day lives through meaningful access to social services to meet their needs – justice delayed in these circumstances is truly justice denied.

In 2013 your Liberal government endorsed the *Roadmap for Choice, Inclusion and Good Lives* for people with disabilities, and set a ten-year time frame for emptying institutions and clearing waitlists. We call on you to fulfill your government's promises by 2023 – including addressing the needs of everyone on the waitlist in a timely manner, and ensuring that no one is unnecessarily institutionalised in large congregate care facilities – through a legislated, multi-year funding commitment. It is within your power to put an end to indifference and contempt for the rights of people with disabilities in this province.

Now, the Province must make a decision. It can allow the 1,500 persons with disabilities in this province lacking necessary supports to languish while hundreds will seek to file their own human rights complaint. Or it can do the right thing, and take immediate steps to resolve the policy and human rights crisis it has created for persons with disabilities and their families.

People with disabilities in Nova Scotia have waited long enough for their human rights. We call upon you to take prompt and effective legislative action to right this historic and ongoing wrong.

Sincerely,



Barb Horner
Disability Rights Coalition

Additional Signatories:

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing

Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

Amnesty International Canada

Canada Without Poverty

Nova Scotia Teachers' Union

Nova Scotia College of Social Workers

Halifax Pride

Halifax-Dartmouth & District Labour Council

Public Service Alliance of Canada – Atlantic Region

The Council of Canadians

Canadian Federation of Students, Nova Scotia

Canadian Union of Postal Workers Nova Local 096

Service Employees' International Union, Local 2, Nova Scotia

Adsum House for Women and Children

YWCA Halifax

North End Community Health Centre

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia Office

Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia

Association of Black Social Workers

Autism Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Association for Community Living (NSACL)

Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities

Independent Living Nova Scotia

L'Arche Atlantic

Nova Scotia Residential Agencies Association, representing:

- Amherst and District Residential Services Society
- CACL – Clare Branch
- CACL- Antigonish
- Cape Breton Community Housing Association
- Cape Breton Residential Society
- Cape Breton West Community Action 2000 Society
- CARES- Cheticamp Area Residential Educational Society
- Celtic Community Homes Association
- Colchester Residential Services Society
- Community Living Alternatives Society
- Community Living CMHA-/Col/E. Hants Branch
- Conway Workshop Association
- Corridor Community Options Society
- Gateway Homes
- Heatherton Group Home Society
- Highland Residential Services Society
- Highland Visions
- Homes For Independent Living (NS)
- Hub Residential Services Society
- Isaiah House
- Isle Madame Small Options Society
- Kings Meadows
- Koster Huis
- L'Arche Antigonish
- L'Arche Cape Breton
- L'Arche Halifax
- L'Arche Home Fires
- Louisdale Community Homes Association
- Mawita'mk
- Metro Community Housing Association
- Our Neighbourhood Living Society
- Port Hood Small Options
- Queens Association for Supported Living
- Regional Occupational Centre
- Regional Residential Services Society
- Resi Care Cape Breton
- SCLO-Riverview Enhanced Living Society
- Shelburne Association Supporting Inclusion
- Society for the Treatment of Autism (NS)

- South Shore Community Service Association (Bonny Lea)
- Support Services Group Co-operative
- Supportive Living Society
- Unity House
- Yarmouth Association for Community Residential Options
- Yarmouth Association for Community Residential Options – Dartmouth

People First Nova Scotia

People First Annapolis County

People First Kings County

People First Truro Chapter

People First Windsor chapter

People First Yarmouth chapter

Advocating Parents of Nova Scotia

Community Homes Action Group

Brain Injury Nova Scotia

James McGregor Stewart Society

Community Living Centres

St. Margaret's Bay & Area Association for Community Living

Women's Center Connect, representing:

- Every Woman's Centre, Sydney;
- Strait Area Women's Place, Port Hawkesbury;
- Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association;
- Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre, New Glasgow;
- The Lotus Centre; Truro;
- L.E.A. Place Women's Resource Centre, Sheet Harbour;
- Second Story Women's Centre, Lunenburg;
- The Women's Place Resource Centre, Annapolis Royal;
- Tri-County Women's Centre, Yarmouth

Nova Scotia New Democratic Party Caucus

Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project

Nova Scotia Government and General
Employees Union Local 58
Mobile Outreach Street Health
Mount Saint Vincent Students' Union
Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group
East Coast Prison Justice Society
Community Society to End Poverty Nova Scotia
Affordable Energy Coalition
Equity Watch
Educators for Social Justice
Solidarity Halifax
Student Activist Law Student Association

Individuals:

Dr. Cynthia Bruce, Faculty of Education, Acadia
University
Roger A. Burrill, Halifax
Fred Bushor, Eastern Passage
Lorna Bushor, Eastern Passage
Kathleen Cameron
Alec Cameron
Lee Cohen, Lee Cohen and Associates Law
Jean Coleman, Halifax
Professor Steve Coughlan, Schulich School of
Law
Cathy Deagle Gammon, Executive Director of
Dartmouth Adult Service Centre
Valeria Del Aguila
Professor Richard Devlin, Schulich School of Law
Professor Alexandra Dobrowolsky, Political
Science Department, Saint Mary's University
Joann Doran
Ben DuPlessis, Halifax
Dr. Jocelyn Downie, Schulich School of Law
Steve Estey, Halifax

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Professor Joanna Erdman, Schulich School of
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Lyle Hadley, Antigonish NS
Roderick Hadley, Antigonish NS
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Susan Harvie
Brian Hennen, founding member of Community
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Dr. Paula Hutchison
Professor El Jones, Nancy's Chair in Women's
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Travis Mills

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Sandra Nelson, Sunshine Personal Home Care

Martha Paynter, Chair of Women's Wellness
Within

Jen Powley, Halifax

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Kathleen Purdy

Susan Reeve-Newson, SRN Autism Services,
Halifax

Heather Reed, Wolfville

Warren Reed, Halifax

Lynda Rogers

Stella Samuels

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