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November 15th 2016

Re: Immediate Action for MMIWG2S

Dear Ministers,

We recently heard from the families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls on the steps of Parliament Hill demanding immediate concrete action from this government. We heard loud and clear the need to end Ottawa's cycle of broken promises. Our hope is that the inquiry, even with its shortfalls, will help with this much needed work. But, we also recognize that we must not wait to see concrete and immediate action.

We cannot wait to address the lack of resources and supports for Indigenous women and children facing violence. NWAC just completed a comprehensive research study once again underlining the overwhelming lack of social, financial, and familial supports to escape violence. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada has repeatedly identified the need to address the same issues in isolated Inuit communities across the Arctic and recently published a strategic plan for violence prevention and healing. The recent Amnesty International report on violence against Indigenous women in northeastern BC had the same findings. These studies reinforce the need for safe places for women and girls and the need to provide access to these spaces.

We recognize these are complex issues with a long list of barriers, but we also recognize that some of the barriers facing Indigenous women and children include federal policies that your government has yet to change, but, could do so immediately. Doctors recently wrote the Health Minister on the barriers placed by Health Canada's travel policies, which, put lives at risk. In taking a look at these policies, they also impact access to safe houses and shelters. These doctors have taken a stand in refusing to follow these policies and we are demanding action from your government to change these policies immediately.

It is disturbing to read in section 12.1 of Health Canada's Non-Insured Health Benefits describing funding for travel that your government will not fund under any circumstances and are not subject to appeal (section K): "transportation to adult day care, respite care and/or interval/safe houses. This is the harshest and most extreme language possible. It is inexcusable for your government to refuse to fund travel under any circumstances and without appeal to interval/safe houses.

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/nihb-ssna/medtransp/2005_med-transp-frame-cadre/index-eng.php#a12

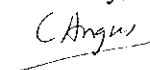
It is shocking to find the federal government forbid under any circumstances "compassionate" access to shelters when women and children are in need. We understand non-insured is a policy restricted to medical situations but we believe we can all agree that if a woman or child sustains injuries and is in need of medical assistance at a hospital or health center, the medical should be covered by NIHB as well as then travel provided to a safe and interval home. And then there should be access to possibly seek shelter or safe housing. These are the exact federal policies creating barriers that must be lifted immediately. Furthermore, we request that NIHB review its entire policy on transportation to assist those who are in need of emergency shelter and transportation.

And beyond transportation, women and girls need shelters to access. In looking at your department's figures it is clear that the budget 2016 investments are not providing a plan to deliver on this immediate need. Your documents show that currently there is only a network of 41 shelters across Canada and that your budget investments will only be building five additional shelters over the next five years for victims of violence on reserve. That means that the government is on pace to have a network of only 46 shelters by 2021-2022, after your mandate.

And we want to emphasize that the federal government's funding for shelters is only for on-reserve communities. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada estimates that at any given time there are approximately only 15 shelters for the 53 Inuit communities across Inuit Nunangat meaning that more than 70% of Inuit communities do not have a safe shelter to access. Inuit communities must be able to access federal funding for shelters to provide solutions specific to the needs of Inuit women and children in the Inuit Nunangat.

These issues are truly non-partisan and we are here to work together on them. However, we demand that there be immediate and urgent action. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Charlie Angus
MP Timmins-James bay



Sheila Malcolmson
MP Nanaimo-Ladysmith