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November 18, 2014

The Honourable Joe Oliver, MP, PC
Minister of Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Open Letter: Budget Bill Restricts Access to Social Assistance for Refugee Claimants

Dear Minister,

As organizations that have an interest in ensuring that everyone in Canada has equal access to income security, we are alarmed by the inclusion of sections 172 and 173 in your recently introduced omnibus Budget Bill C-43. These sections amend the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act* and are essentially Private Members Bill C-585, which was introduced earlier this year.

Many of our organizations are health and social service agencies and legal and community advocates that work directly with refugee claimants and others with precarious immigration status. The change that would be made to the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act* as a result of these provisions would allow provinces to restrict access to social assistance for refugee claimants and others who have not yet been granted permanent residence.

To receive social assistance in any province, one must already qualify through testing and demonstrate great need. To then deny social assistance based on immigration status is to cruelly deny the most vulnerable in our society the crucial lifeline that allows them to survive.

A Federal Court recently described your government's denial of healthcare to refugee claimants as "cruel and unusual". It is disturbing to see another initiative in Parliament that seems to be using legislation to threaten the well-being of migrants attempting to navigate Canada's immigration system.

Fleeing persecution places tremendous stress and burden on families seeking refugee status in Canada. Some of these families suffer from post traumatic stress disorder that can make finding and holding a job difficult without appropriate health care. Work permits take time to be approved and issued, which leaves people with no source of income for months on end. In the interim, access to social assistance is vital to sustain and rebuild lives. Without that source of support, many will be unable to feed, house, or clothe themselves and their families, putting further pressure on already overburdened charities and shelters. We know that poverty leads to poor health outcomes including higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, cancer and depression. We also know that denying basic social benefits, particularly to refugees, contravenes the spirit and letter of numerous international human rights obligations that are binding on Canada, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and the *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*. It is unacceptable for our government to implement policies that worsen people's health and deny their fundamental human rights.

We are also concerned that such a significant legislative change is being included in an omnibus Budget Bill, after being introduced as a Private Members Bill. These are inappropriate processes to deal with such a critical issue as access to basic social benefits. This is particularly the case since these provisions will have far reaching negative consequences for the health, income security, stability, and successful settlement of very vulnerable people who have come to Canada seeking shelter from war and persecution.

Our organizations call on you to withdraw sections 172 and 173 from Bill C-43. We will be making this Open Letter public and will continue to raise this issue with you, your MP colleagues, and the general public.

Sincerely,

Access Alliance Community Health Centre

Access Empowerment Council

Action Plus Brome Missisquoi

Action Réfugiés Montréal

Amnesty International Canada (English speaking)

Anglican Diocese of Niagara

ARCH Disability Law Centre

Arts and Science Students' Union

Association of Ontario Health Centres, Adrianna Tetley, Chief Executive Officer

Association of Ontario Midwives

Association pour la défense des droits sociaux Québec métropolitain (ADDS QM)

Bathurst Street United Church, Toronto

BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Bridges Community Health Centre

Campaign 2000: end child and family poverty in Canada

Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits

Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations

Canadian Association of Muslim Women in Law

Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers

Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW)

Canadian Council for Refugees, Loly Rico, President

Canadian Council for Social Development (CCSD)

Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care

Canadian Federation of University Women

Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

Canadian Health Coalition

Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH)

Canadian Romani Alliance

Carrefour d'aide aux nouveaux arrivants (CANA)

Central Toronto Community Health Centres

Centre d'Action socio-communautaire de Montréal (CASCAM)

Centre de recherche d'emploi de l'est

Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs

Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples

Centre francophone de Toronto

Centre justice et foi

Champlain Community Health Centre Executive Directors' Network, Jack McCarthy, Chair, ED of Somerset West CHC

Church of the Holy Trinity, Trinity Square, Toronto

Citizens for Public Justice

Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)

Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa

Colour of Poverty / Colour of Change Network

Comité d'aide aux réfugiés

Comité des Personnes Assistées Sociales de Pointe-Saint-Charles Montréal

Committee for Accessible AIDS Treatment

Common Frontiers

Community Advocacy & Legal Centre

Community Legal Assistance Sarnia

Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN), Richard Lavigne, directeur général

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

Council of Canadians

Ernestine's Women's Shelter

FCJ Refugee Centre

Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes

Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges

Flemingdon Community Legal Services

Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec

Groupe-Ressource du Plateau Mont-Royal

Hamilton Community Legal Clinic

Health For All

Health Providers Against Poverty

HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario (HALCO)

HOPE (Hamilton)

Immigrant and Refugee Support Centre

Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC)

Industrial Accident Victims Group of Ontario (IAVGO)

Injured Workers Action for Justice

Injured Workers' Consultants (IWC)

Inner City Health Associates

In-School & Library Settlement Services

Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC)

Interim Place

Interprofessional Medical and Allied Groups for Improving Neighbourhood Environment (IMAGINE Clinic)

Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service

Jewish - Refugee Action Network (JRAN)

John Howard Society of Toronto

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

Kensington Bellwoods Community Legal Services

Kinbrace Community Society

Kingston Community Legal Clinic

Kinna-aweya Legal Clinic

L'Ombre-Elle

La Clé sur la Porte

La Maison

Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network

Le Centre Afrika

le Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU)

Le Regroupement des assistées sociales et assistés sociaux du Témiscouata (Rasst)

Legal Assistance of Windsor

Ligue des droits et libertés

L'R des centres de femmes du Québec, Carolle Mathieu, présidente

Matthew House, Toronto

Mennonite Central Committee Canada

Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support

Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic

Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto

Mississauga Community Legal Clinic

Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association (MWSSA)

National Council of Women of Canada

Neighbourhood Legal Services – London

ODSP Action Coalition

Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), James Ryan, President

Ottawa Sanctuary City Network

Parkdale Community Legal Services

Pathway to Potential, Adam Vasey, Director

Presbyterian Church in Canada, Life and Mission Agency, The Rev. Dr. Richard W. Fee, General Secretary

Project Genesis, Michael Chervin, Executive Director

Provincial Council of Women of Ontario

Public Health Students' Association, Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Rainbow Refugee

Refugee Lawyers Association of Ontario

Refugee Support Group of Trinity-St. Paul's United Church

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)

Regroupement des assistées sociales et assistés sociaux du Témiscouata

Regroupement des comités logement et associations de locataires du Québec

Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec (RCCQ)

Réseau d'intervention auprès des personnes ayant subi la violence organisée (RIVO)

Romero House, Joseph Schmidt, President of the Board of Directors

Sanctuary Coalition

Scarborough Community Legal Services (SCLS)

SDG Legal Clinic

Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office, Kingston, Ontario

Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, Office for Systemic Justice, Sue Wilson, Director

Social Assistance Reform Network of Niagara (SARNN)

Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo

Social Planning Council of Sudbury, Janet Gasparini

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Edmonton Central Council

Sojourn House

South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

South Ottawa Community Legal Services

South Riverdale Community Health Centre

Student Christian Movement

Students Against Bill C-585

Students for Medicare

Sudbury Community Legal Clinic

Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec, Lucie Martineau, présidente générale

Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI)

The Redwood

Toronto Christian Resource Centre

Toronto Public Health

United Church of Canada, Church in Mission Unit, Michael Blair, Executive Minister

United Church of Canada, Justice and Global Justice Team, Toronto Southeast Presbytery

University of Toronto Medical Society

University of Toronto Medical Students for Refugee Care

University of Toronto Students' Union

Voices from the Street

Welcome Home Refugee Housing Community, Sharon Schmidt, Director

Wellesley Institute

West End Legal Services of Ottawa

West Neighbourhood House

West Scarborough Community Legal Services

Woman Abuse Council of Toronto

Women Speak Out

Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre

Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

Working for Change

World Renew

Canadian Council for Refugees

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