



First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa

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February 19, 2016

Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9

E-mailed to finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca

Dear Finance Committee Members,

Re: Consultation on the 2016 federal budget - social infrastructure investment and national housing strategy

I am writing with respect to the preparation of the 2016 federal budget which will set out the federal government's spending and policy priorities for the 42nd parliament. The Poverty Awareness Working Group of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa urges you to ensure that the budget responds effectively to the important national issues of homelessness and the insufficiency of affordable housing.

The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa was established in 1898. It is guided by the principles set out in Appendix A. Through various worship and social responsibility activities, the Congregation and individual members support the advancement of human rights and social justice in housing for low-income Canadians. Current activities are set out in Appendix B.

A secure home provides a stable base from which people can raise a family, find and keep work, invest in additional training and put healthy food on the table. We ask that the government's commitment to federal re-investment in affordable housing, and especially in social housing, referred to in the Prime Minister's mandate letters to various Cabinet Ministers in December 2015, be set out in detail in the 2016 budget. Specifically, we ask the government to commit to:

- building 100,000 new units of social and affordable rental housing;
- repairing and maintaining existing social housing to protect and renew it; and
- supporting people through rent subsidies and the services they need to stay securely and adequately housed.

We believe that this can best be accomplished with the establishment in legislation of a rights-based National Housing Strategy, along with the allocation of adequate, stable, long-term funding in annual budgets. This will allow the federal government to make significant progress in the first year of its mandate, while establishing the conditions for success in the following years. We have been encouraged in the past by significant Parliamentary support for a national housing strategy and urge you to commit funds at this time to support such a strategy.

You have heard from others that, over the past 25 years, Canada's population has increased by 30% while annual federal investment in affordable housing decreased by 46%. At the same time, private development of rental housing trickled to a halt and chronic homelessness exploded. Now nearly 1 in 4 Canadian households cannot afford their housing and 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness every year – 35,000 on any one day.

John Marsh, Minister ▪ Maury Prevost, President ▪ Carolyn Turner, Director of Operations
Liz Roper, Director of Lifespan Learning ▪ Dierdre Kellerman, Director of Music

As federal social housing operating subsidies expire, it is necessary to renew funding for public, nonprofit and cooperative housing providers to ensure that rents remain affordable for tenants in the long term. (Current operating agreements are gradually declining from \$1.6 billion in 2015 to \$0 in 2040, putting 365,000 Canadian households at risk of economic eviction and possibly homelessness.) We ask that you restore this funding in the upcoming budget so that vulnerable households will not risk the loss of their homes.

In summary, we urge you to include in the 2016 budget sufficient funds to support:

- the creation, in consultation and partnership with provincial, territorial, municipal and civil society agencies, a national housing strategy to end homelessness and ensure an adequate supply of accessible, secure and affordable housing;
- social infrastructure projects to create new affordable and social rental housing (100,000 units);
- social infrastructure projects to repair and maintain affordable housing - target grants for capital repairs, retrofits and maintenance of public, non-profit and cooperative housing providers who need it – encourage energy efficiency; and
- the extension of operating agreements that are ending so housing co-ops and other non-profit housing providers can continue to provide rent-g geared-to-income subsidies in their developments.

Thank you for considering our concerns and suggestions.

Sincerely,



Mike Wheeler, Chair
Poverty Awareness Working Group

cc: Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance, Email: bill.Morneau@parl.gc.ca
cc: Honourable Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Email: Amarjeet.Sohi@parl.gc.ca
Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development,
Email: Jean-Yves.Duclos@parl.gc.ca
cc: Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Email: Adam.Vaughan@parl.gc.ca

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Appendix A Unitarian Principles

As Unitarians, we covenant to affirm and promote:

- the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- a free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregation and in society at large;
- the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and
- respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Source: Canadian Unitarian Council (<http://cuc.ca/principles-and-sources/>) and First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (<http://www.firstunitarianottawa.ca/about-unitarian-universalism.html>)

Appendix B Examples of First Unitarian Social Justice Activities related to Housing

The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and individual members support the advancement of human rights and social justice in housing for low-income Canadians. Currently, such activities involve:

- fundraising for, and supporting the management and expansion of, the Multifaith Housing Initiative, a charitable organization providing low-income housing in Ottawa;
- providing volunteers and funding for Shawenjeagamik (House of Compassion, often referred to as Centre 510), a day program for homeless and marginally housed aboriginal people in Ottawa, operated by the Odawa Native Friendship Centre;
- collection, storage and delivery of furniture and household goods for aboriginal women moving from the Oshki Kizis Lodge (women's shelter) of the Minwaashin Lodge (aboriginal women's support centre in Ottawa) to independent accommodation;
- fundraising and other support for Ancoura, a charitable Ottawa organization supporting adults living with mental illness through stable, affordable housing and a supportive community;
- provision of housing and other supports to a Syrian refugee family and participation in Ottawa's Refugee613 Housing Committee;
- keeping ourselves and others informed about the causes of and solutions for homelessness, the services for homeless and marginally housed people in Ottawa, organizations providing services for and promoting strategies to expand social and supportive housing in Ottawa, Ontario and nationally;
- liaising with local, provincial and national organizations concerned about the same matters; and
- encouraging a national housing strategy.

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