



Hon. Ahmed Hussen, P.C, M.P.
Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development
140 Promenade du Portage
Phase IV, 14th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J2

May 13, 2020

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the members of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA), I want to thank you and your government for the various measures you have introduced to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, especially in such a timely manner. CHRA appreciates the efforts that the federal government has taken to address this unprecedented situation.

Despite the measures that have already been taken, there are additional measures that CHRA feels the federal government should pursue in order to protect access to housing and the affordable housing sector in the short term and long term. The current pandemic has demonstrated the vital importance of housing; as public health officials have made clear, staying at home has been identified as the most important risk mitigation measure available to individual Canadians.

In addition to the measures already taken, CHRA is proposing the federal government adopt the following short-term and longer-term measures in order to ensure the safety, supply, and long-term viability of the community housing sector during and after the current pandemic:

- **Work with provinces and territories to direct adequate supplies of Personal Protective Equipment to housing providers:** According to a number of provincial surveys of affordable housing providers, the lack of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the pandemic has been a top source of concern. Although we acknowledge that PPE shortages have been a concern across the country, especially with front line health care workers, we would urge the federal government to recognize that workers in non profit housing organizations face similar risks as health care workers when providing service to tenants, especially tenants who are in self-isolation after contracting the virus. We ask that you work with your provincial-territorial counterparts to ensure that housing workers are provided with sufficient supplies of PPE.
- **Waive interest payments for non profit housing providers on CMHC-held deferred mortgages:** In April, I wrote the President and CEO of CMHC asking that CMHC waive interest payments on CMHC-held mortgages that CMHC had agreed to defer as a response to the pandemic – I have appended a copy of that letter. Although CHRA appreciates the mortgage deferral policy, the fact that interest continues to be charged is another burden that housing providers will need to cope with. The President of CMHC responded by stating that waiving of interest is not being

considered at this time, but could be considered in the future. As Minister, CHRA would ask that you agree to waive all interest charges for the short-term deferral period of CMHC-held mortgages held by non profit housing organizations.

- **Finalize federal-provincial-territorial negotiations on the Canada Housing Benefit:** The November 2017 National Housing Strategy announced a \$4 billion “Canada Housing Benefit” that was intended to be in place by 2020. However, to date, only 1 province has signed an agreement to implement the program. Given the serious concerns regarding income support during the pandemic, we would call on the federal government to prioritize the completion of the remaining agreements so that the Benefit money can flow as soon as possible.
- **Finalize the bilateral agreement with the Government of Quebec on the National Housing Strategy:** As you know, Quebec remains the only province not to have signed a bilateral agreement to implement the full suite of National Housing Strategy programs. Like all provinces, Quebec will need to access the funds and programs under the NHS to protect and grow its stock of affordable housing in that province. We would urge the federal government to prioritize the completion of a bilateral agreement with Quebec so that the benefits of the NHS can flow in that province.
- **Implement a program to enable non profit housing providers and municipal housing authorities to acquire properties for the purposes of affordable housing on a permanent basis:** Many municipal and provincial jurisdictions are currently leasing properties such as hotels on a short term basis in order to house vulnerable populations during the pandemic; particularly homeless individuals. However, what will happen to these individuals and properties once the pandemic is over? Should we kick these people back out on the streets? CHRA is urging the federal government to work with provinces, territories, and municipalities on an acquisition policy and program that would provide community housing providers with the opportunity to acquire properties on a permanent basis, so that vulnerable populations can continue to have access to safe housing. It’s possible that such a program could be implemented using existing programs, such as the National Co-investment Fund, although the mandate and scope of the program would need to be considerably modified. CHRA is currently working with partners on an acquisitions policy proposal, which will be forwarded to you once completed.
- **Introduce and implement an urban, rural, and northern Indigenous housing strategy as outlined in your December 13, 2019 mandate letter:** As you know, in your Ministerial mandate letter, the Prime Minister requested that you develop an urban and rural Indigenous housing strategy in consultation with Indigenous peoples. We understand that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development has committed to undertaking a study on this issue. The CHRA Indigenous Caucus has developed a “For Indigenous, By Indigenous” plan that provides a framework for an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy. We would urge you to work with our Indigenous Caucus so that an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy can be quickly adopted.
- **Make capital investments in affordable housing a key component of any post-pandemic stimulus policy:** There has already been discussion about the possibility of an economic stimulus package to re-energize the Canadian economy once the pandemic has largely passed; a package that would largely focus on infrastructure investment. CHRA supports the concept of infrastructure spending as a form of stimulus; however, if pursued, we would urge the federal

government to focus stimulus spending on capital investments to repair and renew existing affordable housing, and construct new affordable housing. Not only would affordable housing stimulus spending better protect Canadians in the event of a future pandemic, but as stated by your Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan, “this also localizes the work and the benefit right down to specific neighbourhoods and demographics”. An additional advantage of this approach is that delivery programs already exist; programs such as the Federal Lands Initiative or the National Co-investment Fund could be simplified and expanded to ensure that funds are able to flow quickly, and the stock of affordable housing is protected and expanded in a timely manner.

Once again, thank you Minister for the hard work of you, your officials, CMHC, and the federal government in responding to this crisis. We hope that the recommendations in this letter will prove useful as you continue to evaluate what measures can be taken to improve the health and welfare of all people in Canada.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Morrison', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeff Morrison
Executive Director

cc. Adam Vaughan, MP
Stephanie Kusie, MP
Denis Trudel, MP
Jagmeet Singh, MP
Jenny Kwan, MP
Evan Siddall, President and CEO, CMHC

Mr. Evan Siddall, President and CEO
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Via Email: esiddall@cmhc-schl.gc.ca

April 14, 2020

Dear Evan,

On behalf of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, I want to thank you and the staff at CMHC for your hard work in responding to the current pandemic crisis. This is an unprecedented situation; CMHC's efforts to assist the community housing sector in this difficult time are appreciated.

As you know, one of the measures introduced by CMHC in response to the pandemic was to provide borrowers holding a CMHC financed loan with up to six months of loan payment deferral. However, under the terms of this arrangement, interest will accrue for housing providers who exercise this option. By way of this letter, I am requesting that CMHC adjust the terms of this arrangement to waive interest payments for the duration of the deferral.

Community housing providers generally serve low income, vulnerable populations who are being more directly impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic when compared to other housing providers. Community housing providers are bearing a disproportionately high burden of non-payment of rent – and given their policy objective of providing safe, affordable housing, they will be in a difficult position when it comes to recouping that lost rent when the pandemic is over. Although the mortgage deferral announced by CMHC is a welcome step to address this crisis, the accrual of interest represents an additional burden that community housing providers will have to address at a time when their options to address interest accrual are limited. A short-term waiving of interest for the period of the deferral will be one less challenge they will need to face when this crisis is over, and will ensure that they can maintain housing affordability for their tenants, at a time when housing affordability is a desperately needed policy imperative across Canada.

Thank you for considering this proposal. As always, I look forward to continuing to work with you and the CMHC team in the weeks and months ahead to address this crisis.

Yours truly,

Jeff Morrison
Executive Director