



November 10, 2021

The Honourable Carla Qualtrough
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion
Carla.Qualtrough@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
Minister of National Revenue
Diane.Lebouthillier@cra-arc.gc.ca

Dear Ministers Qualtrough and Lebouthillier:

Re: Reversing the Negative Impact of CERB Payments on GIS Eligibility

I am writing in my capacity as Executive Director & General Counsel of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). LEAF is a national, non-profit organization that works to advance the substantive equality rights of women and girls through litigation, law reform, and public education.

First, congratulations to both of you on your re-appointment as Ministers in the current government. I hope to have the opportunity to work with you to advance gender equality in Canada, consistent with what I know this government's priorities to be.

In furtherance of a commitment to gender equality, I'm writing today to urge you to exclude the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) from the calculation of seniors' income so that low-income working seniors do not lose their Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments.

70% of GIS recipients are women. Additionally, a loss of GIS disproportionately impacts First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and racialized seniors who access GIS. These are the seniors who are being affected by a loss of GIS.

We know that we will not achieve gender equality in this country until we have addressed the feminization and racialization of poverty. With approximately 16% of senior women in Canada living in poverty, GIS is one step towards doing so.

As you know, however, some low-income seniors have lost or seen a major reduction in their GIS benefit since July 2021 because they received CERB payments last year.

The impact of losing GIS is immense. It has created problems with paying rent, buying groceries or medicine, and affording other basic necessities. It is also counter-intuitive to the purpose of GIS itself, which is to reduce seniors' poverty. Losing GIS this year due to receiving CERB payments last year has created the possibility of increasing seniors' poverty and even homelessness.



In addition to this immediate problem, the legal routes available for seniors to request a reversal of a reduction in GIS are very limited and complicated. The appeal routes differ based on the government entity through which the senior applied to receive CERB payments – the CRA or Service Canada. This is arbitrary and unfair.

This is not a problem that can be solved on an individual basis by seniors who are still struggling as the pandemic continues. This is a systemic problem that was not addressed when the CERB was created and that needs to be addressed now.

I am asking you to fix this problem by taking steps to:

- Exclude CERB payments from the calculation of income for seniors;
- Recalculate the GIS and other income-determined seniors' benefits for 2020-2021;
- Retroactively return the lost benefits; and,
- Apply the readjusted benefit amount for the duration of the 2021-2022 year.

By taking these actions, you will help make sure that low-income working seniors – including the 70% of GIS recipients who are women – will not experience increased and unnecessary hardship during the pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pam Hrick".

Pam Hrick
Executive Director & General Counsel
Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

CC:

The Honourable Kamal Khara
Minister of Seniors
Kamal.Khara@hrsdcc-rhdcc.gc.ca

The Honourable Marci Ien
Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Youth
Marci.Ien@cfc-swc.gc.ca