February 25, 2019

Re: Common Good Retirement Plan

To whom it may concern,

Over two million people work in Canada’s not-for-profit and charitable sector. These Canadians work every day to raise our quality of life, serve our most vulnerable, protect our environment, care for our children, and so much more. Supporting our voluntary sector was one of my key priorities as Governor General, and continues to be a critical focus of my work as Chair of the Rideau Hall Foundation. The strength of our not-for-profit sector depends on the well-being of the sector’s workforce. One obstacle to that well-being is financial insecurity. Nearly half of not-for-profit workers lack stable, full-time employment. A similarly large number of workers, most of them lower- and moderate-income, lack access to high-quality benefits. While there is no simple explanation for these challenges, I believe we can and should do more to support the financial security of those who work hard every day to make Canada a better place.

A group of respected leaders in the not-for-profit sector recently brought to my attention an initiative called the Common Good Retirement Plan. Common Good is a sector-led effort to establish a national, portable, collective retirement plan for Canada’s not-for-profit sector. Nearly one million workers in the not-for-profit sector do not have access to a workplace retirement plan, making it much more difficult for them to retire with dignity and putting many at risk of living out their elderly years in or near poverty. There is strong evidence that access to a workplace retirement plan is a critical determinant of a person’s financial security.

Common Good is a welcome and carefully conceived initiative involving some of the most distinguished leaders from Canada’s not-for-profit sector, in collaboration with a group of our country’s top retirement security and pension experts. The proposed plan builds on the
principles underlying Canada’s globally-respected pension plans — including a strong governance model that puts plan members’ interests first — and adapts them to the needs of workers and employers in our diverse not-for-profit sector, taking into account changes in how people work.

Common Good deserves the support of those who care about the strength of our not-for-profit sector. Not-for-profit employers looking to increase the financial security of their workforce, or to improve attraction and retention of talented workers, would do well to give the plan careful consideration. Not-for-profit boards of directors may wish to explore what more can be done to enhance benefits within their organizations, now that high-quality options such as Common Good are available. I am also hopeful that the Common Good initiative, combined with recent enhancements to our Canada Pension Plan, will help improve the knowledge and confidence levels of workers in the not-for-profit sector when it comes to issues of retirement security.

I commend the efforts of the growing national coalition of Canadians behind the Common Good initiative. As an example of social innovation — leaders from across sectors coming together to address a major social issue — Common Good shows what collaborative, public-minded leadership can accomplish. I am pleased to lend support to the initiative and wish those working on it every success.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Right Honourable David Johnston
Governor General of Canada (2010-2017)
Chair of the Rideau Hall Foundation