SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON DIVISION 20 OF BILL C-97, AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE BUDGET TABLED IN PARLIAMENT ON MARCH 19, 2019 AND OTHER MEASURES

May 27, 2019

Dignity for All is the campaign to end poverty in Canada, co-led by Canada Without Poverty (CWP) and Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ). Since 2009, we have mobilized supporters to push for federal leadership to address poverty in Canada. Please consider the following document the submission of Dignity for All with regard to the Poverty Reduction Act within Division 20 of Part 4 of the Budget Implementation Act (BIA).

The Dignity for All campaign supports the Poverty Reduction Act, however, we urge the Senate Social Affairs Committee to consider amendments to strengthen the legislation to better align with Canada’s international obligations, including the first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end poverty by 2030.

i. Civil Society’s Response to Bill C-87, An Act respecting the reduction of poverty

In February 2019, the Dignity for All Campaign and partner, Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty, sent an open letter to The Honourable Minister Jean-Yves Duclos regarding Bill C-87, An Act respecting the reduction of poverty.

The open letter was signed by over 500 organizations and individuals including the Canadian Council of Churches; ACORN Canada; the Canadian Health Coalition; Canadian Women’s Foundation; UNICEF Canada; Oxfam Canada; and many others. The letter highlighted our concerns with the bill in its proposed state, while also providing our recommendations regarding; the target of reducing poverty by 20% of 2015 levels by 2020 and 50% of 2015 levels by 2030; establishment of the Market Basket Measure (MBM) as Canada’s official poverty line; and the creation of a National Advisory Council of Poverty. Please see attached the open letter dated February 1, 2019.

While Dignity for All was supportive of Bill C-87, together with our partners, we voiced serious concerns with the legislation as it was tabled in November 2018.

To ensure that the new legislation implements Canada’s international human rights obligations and the Sustainable Development Goals, our coalition undertook significant efforts with Minister Duclos’ office and other Parliamentarians to amend the legislation before it was to be studied at committee.

Unfortunately, despite these efforts, none of the proposed amendments – nor any concerns from other civil society partners – were considered as the language of Bill C-87 was lifted word-for-word into Division 20 of Part 4 of the BIA.
ii. **Recommendations**

We call upon the Senate Social Affairs Committee to bring forward these concerns, by considering the following recommendations:

a) Amend the legislation to affirm economic and social rights as ratified by Canada, including: the right to an adequate standard of living; right to food; right to housing; right to work and access to childcare; right to social security; right to health as articulated in international human rights laws, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as fundamental human rights;

b) Establish regulations to the *Poverty Reduction Act*, which articulate that the goal to reduce poverty by 50% of 2015 MBM levels by 2030 is a minimum target. Regulations must reflect that the obligation under the Sustainable Development Goals is to end poverty in Canada.

c) Establish measures to ensure Canada’s official poverty line genuinely reflects the experience of poverty in Canada, particularly those in marginalized groups who are more likely to experience poverty. This includes:

   I. Taking every available step to ensure Statistics Canada understands that its role in measuring poverty in Canada must be in furtherance of our international human rights obligations and the SDGs;

   II. Ensuring regulations which provide clarification of the “regular basis” upon which the MBM is assessed as up-to-date. Ensure that this review includes public input, particularly by individuals living in poverty; and;

   III. Acknowledging in regulations that multiple measures provide a fuller understanding of poverty and should continue to be part of the measuring and monitoring process of the PRS, particularly regarding sub-indicators and sub-targets in the dashboard. This dashboard must be easily accessible to the public.

   IV. Through regulation, recognizing the disproportionate impact of poverty on racialized communities, mandating the collection of disaggregated data and the adoption of a racial equity impact lens to measure the effectiveness of the strategy.

d) Ensure that the National Advisory Council on Poverty can adequately implement accountability of government for those living in poverty for the progressive realisation of the right to an adequate standard of living and social security rights, as guaranteed by articles 2(1), 9 and 11 of the ICESCR. This includes:

   i. Ensuring through regulations that the Advisory Council is independent; given authority to make recommendations and require remedial action for compliance with the rights of people in poverty; and sufficient budget to fulfill its mandate.
This includes oversight of progress of the PRS, public reporting, and public engagement.

ii. Establishing regulations to set a clear schedule for implementation with a commitment to review progress on the strategy annually, plans for collaboration with provinces and territories, coordination with the National Housing Strategy, and the mandate, budget and public reporting process for the Advisory Council. This includes a commitment to introduce a new strategy with updated targets and timelines every five years.

iii. Ensuring the Advisory Council can establish an adjudication body, which includes both experts in human rights and persons with lived experience of poverty, to hold accessible hearings into systemic issues affecting the progressive realization of rights and to recommend effective remedies.

iv. Ensuring the Advisory Council has the authority to make recommendations to Parliament, which must be responded to by the Minister with reasons as to whether recommendations will be implemented.

v. Ensuring in regulations that the majority of representatives on the Advisory Council are experts in human rights and poverty, including persons with lived experience of poverty.

vi. Principles of equality and non-discrimination must be applied to representatives to ensure diversity based on region, race, sex, disability and other grounds.

vii. Amend section 11 of Division 20, which authorizes the dissolution of the council once poverty has been reduced by 50% of 2015 MBM levels, to ensure an ongoing mandate for the Council to oversee a goal of sustained poverty eradication.

e) In addition to this legislation, co-develop initiatives to ensure accountability and implementation of remedies for the distinctive barriers faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit persons living in poverty.

Along with Canada’s first anti-poverty strategy, this legislation provides a historic opportunity for leadership. With our global commitments to end poverty by 2030, and our aspiration to be a country that leads on human rights, the time is now to implement anti-poverty legislation that move us forward to a more equal Canada.

We look forward to answering any questions on this written brief.
iii. Description of Organizations Submitting this Brief

Canada Without Poverty (CWP)

CWP, formerly known as NAPO (the National Anti-Poverty Organization), is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, and charitable organization dedicated to ending poverty in Canada. For nearly 50 years, CWP has been championing the human rights of individuals experiencing poverty and since our inception, we have been governed by a Board of Directors comprised entirely of people with a lived experience of poverty.

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ)

CPJ is a national, faith-based not-for-profit and charitable organization that works on Canadian public policy, primarily in the areas of poverty eradication in Canada, ecological justice, and refugee rights. For over 50 years, CPJ has provided research, educational resources, and advocacy campaigns to engage people across Canada in public policy from a faith-based and public justice perspective.