

Meeting with Honourable Paul Pike, Minister CSSD

September 11, 2023 @ 2:30 PM

Topics for Discussion:

Advise Purpose of Coalition and introduce Coalition Members.

The Mandate Letter for your portfolio as instructed by the Premier on April 15, 2021, would still appear to be a relevant mandate for your ministry, as no revised Mandate Letter appears to have been issued. Consequently, the matters that have an impact on seniors are:

- Strengthening relationships with organizations (in our instance, a Seniors & Pensioners' advocacy association);
- Leading a review of existing government measures to address poverty, including housing and food insecurity and develop a renewed poverty reduction strategy;
- Working with your colleagues, develop an intergenerational program guide to increase interaction between youth and seniors;
- Address issues important to seniors, in particular the issues identified by the Seniors' Advocate;
- Finalize the review of the Adult Protection Act;
- Promote Age Friendly Communities Program;
- Working with the Minister of H & CS, reinvest identified savings into areas of healthcare that will improve the social determinants of health and wellness.

First off, we would like to compliment the Government and you for your actions to cover the cost of drivers' medicals for seniors 75 years of age or older and for putting measures in place for those who have paid for these medicals to recover their expenditure.

We also compliment this Department and the Aging & Seniors Division for all their work in the revisions to the Adult Protection Act and the work on the supporting Regulations that we approved last December. More on this latter comment a bit later.

Right now, we wish to raise the following with you:

- 1. Social & Economic Well-Being Plan (Poverty Reduction):** Please excuse my use of the words “poverty reduction”. I know the Government and other circles do not like the use of these words, but I prefer their use since it drives home what it is we are hoping will be achieved by the new strategy. This Coalition participated in several meetings and submitted commentary during the stakeholder consultation process. We understood the SEWP was into the collation of all the feedback and input and then the writing stage into the winter of 2023 and that there would be a community summit when the Plan was developed.

We are seeking an update on what is happening with the development of this Plan and when might a draft be available for review and the community summit scheduled.

On a related note, we cannot emphasize enough how very concerned we are with the continuing escalating cost of living, especially as it affects seniors living on fixed incomes. Our organizations have heard from many people about the overwhelming increases in food prices, fuel costs, and other goods. It is becoming more and more difficult for older people to manage. Some short-term assistance plans are appreciated but they do not go far enough to balance the older person’s income with these costs of basic living. Is there any additional information that you can share about what remedial and long-term steps the Government might be considering to offset the high rate of inflation?

- 2. Adult Protection Act & Elder Abuse.** We compliment this Department and the work of the staff on the passage of Bill 40 and the subsequent passage of the regulations, NLR84/22.

The current Mandate Letters for the Federal Ministers of justice and Seniors directed the Minister of Justice to work with the Minister of Seniors to strengthen Canada’s approach to elder abuse by:

- a. Creating a national definition of elder abuse.
- b. Investing in better data collection and law enforcement related to elder abuse.
- c. Establishing new offences and penalties in the Criminal Code related to elder abuse.

This matter was raised in past meetings with the former CSSD Minister who agreed to consult our Minister of Justice and that he would ensure the matter was raised at the upcoming F/P/T Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Seniors, which I understood would have been in February of 2022. There may have been other meetings of the F/P/T Committee since then, also.

All my research indicates that our Province gets a high grade with our Adult Protection Act and Regulations, but if these are to be fully effective, the amendments to the Criminal Code are needed to ensure the elimination of elder abuse and that the penalties for such criminal behavior will be dealt with severely. As you are new to your portfolio, we wanted to apprise you of this issue for your awareness and to ask you to ensure this gets discussion at any meetings with federal Ministers.

- 3. Position of Seniors' Advocate.** This coalition is very concerned with the inclusion of the position of the Seniors' Advocate in the current Review of the Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly. There has not been enough longevity with the position of the Seniors' Advocate for there to be any review of its purpose, usefulness, impact, structure, and administration. This Statutory Office has only had a lifetime of seven years since the ACT RESPECTING THE SENIORS ADVOCATE was assented on December 14, 2016, and the Regulations were filed on June 15, 2017. The first Seniors' Advocate was appointed in November of 2017, and following her retirement, the position was vacant for approximately a year, before the current Seniors' Advocate was appointed in June of 2022. The lobby to create the position of Seniors' Advocate has had a long history in Newfoundland and Labrador, dating back many years, with this having been a key advocated action by this Coalition, dating back to at least 2008, when this Coalition was established.

This Coalition filed a strong supporting case to the Review Commissioner for the retention, and even enhancement, of this position. Given all that we know, and Government knows about our population demographics, our social determinants of health, our very poor health report card, and our lack of home and community support systems lack of health issues, this is not the time to even consider an elimination of this position or a combination of it with any other position. Our Paper is on record, and we trust we have your support to continue this position when the Commissioner's Report comes forward to the House of Assembly.

4. **Intergenerational Program Guide.** We are inquiring about the status of the development of the promised Intergenerational Program Guide. This was referenced over two years ago and the GNL website does show the stakeholder questionnaire, but I am unable to locate any additional information that advises the "What We Heard" or when/what will be the next steps. This Guide will be very helpful in encouraging activities, learnings, and sharing of opportunities amongst generations that will eventually build stronger communities, enhance well-being, and reduce the prevalence of ageism. Can you provide an update?
5. **Ageism.** The F/P/T Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum launched a consultation on ageism, which opened on August 15, 2022, and closed on October 31, 2022. The Ministers looked to better understand and address the negative impacts of ageism towards older adults in Canada. The consultation was intended to focus on ageism towards older adults in Canada, how they experience it, and potential solutions to address it.

A ***What We Heard Report*** was to be produced following the consultations, with a final report to follow to enable FPT governments to consider how they may address this important issue. One report, ***An Examination of the Social and Economic Impacts of Ageism***, covering source documents from 2014 to 2019, was released in February 2022 and contains reference to some 122 actions that are happening within Canada and on the international scene. Programs, such as intergenerational activities, age-friendly community initiatives, growing older at home, incentives to work longer, etc. are all laudable and more are needed. But what really is needed is a total shift of thinking and cultural approach so that older adults are not

seen as a burden but as productive, dependable, experienced, and valued members of the community.

In NL, this ties in very directly to the work on the Intergenerational Program Guide, Age-Friendly communities, and the recent Well-Being week announced on September 6 by the Premier.

As a member of the FPT Ministers Responsible for Seniors, do you have any update on this planned undertaking?

6. Promoting Age Friendly Communities. This is a very commonly used phrase these days and it seems to appear in a lot of public messaging at different levels of Government. This Coalition has participated in several discussions and meetings for the purpose of developing an Age-Friendly Communities direction and we are pleased to see the ***2021-22 Age-Friendly Newfoundland and Labrador Communities Program*** with associated funding streams. Our question currently, is what is happening towards embedding this into municipal structures to ensure that communities who call themselves “age-friendly” are sustained in that direction into the long-term? One-off projects are wonderful for the purpose they are proposed, but unless there is a buy-in from municipalities for long-term sustainability, the direction to becoming fully recognizable as an age-friendly community will be lost when the government of the municipality changes and the newer administration has a different focus.

7. Aging in Place. Is your Department anticipating any undertakings that would enable older persons to age at home or in their communities?

The memberships of this Coalition and the research that was done to support the NL Health Accord clearly and strongly state that persons wish to age well at home or in their communities, but to achieve this, there must be a significant shift in how health care services are managed. While we know health care services are the responsibility of the Minister of Health and Community Services, we also know that transforming health care from an acute care model (where some 80%-90% of all health care dollars are spent) to a community-based model that strives to improve on the social determinants of health will not be an easy task. It requires a commitment

from all levels of Government and community partners to a transformative strategy, which we know this Government is committed to achievement.

In June of 2022, the Minister of Seniors announced the launch of a new initiative called Age Well at Home, which was intended to help seniors stay in their homes for as long as possible by providing them with practical assistance for everyday tasks. The federal budget of 2021 provided \$90 million dollars of funding over four years, starting in 2022-2023 for organizations to apply for funding for projects under two streams: In-Home Support Pilot Projects and Scaling Up for Seniors. I won't elaborate on some of the drawbacks to the way this program is being developed and delivered.

Our question for today is how your Ministry is being or will be, and in what ways, engaged in projects that are funded under this new direction?

8. **Building a Relationship with Federal Minister of Seniors.** This Coalition is particularly concerned about the need for a **National Seniors Strategy**. We have been raising this matter for several years now and we continue to be disappointed that there is no commitment to such a Strategy. The current directions for Minister O'Regan remain founded in the Mandate Letter to former Minister Khra and regrettably, they are not founded in any overall Government strategy that is guided by Principles and Values that guarantee aging persons a decent, respectful, and acceptable living as they journey through their senior years. This portfolio places a lot of emphasis on the New Horizons for Seniors Program and working in collaboration with the Ministers of Health, Justice, and Families, Children and Social Development to deliver on programs/strategies that are sourced in these other portfolios. Given what has been well documented and what we all know about our aging demographic and the vulnerabilities of aging persons, it is time that the Government of Canada directed the development and implementation of a National Seniors Strategy. This Coalition will continue to raise this matter in our meetings with our NL Federal MPs, but your support and lobby to your provincial colleagues and the Minister of Seniors would go a long way to seeing such a strategy developed.

Thank you for your time today, Minister Pike.

Best wishes with the business of the people in the House of Assembly and fulfilling your Departmental mandate. We welcome all opportunities to provide input on provincial directions impacting older persons and to offer the Coalition as a “sounding board” before directions are taken that might not be in the best interest of older people.