



Canadian Council for Reform Judaism

March 27, 2020

Dear Member of Parliament,

We are writing as members of the Reform Jewish community in Canada in gratitude for your committed public service at this time.

We are heartened by the focused, science-based, non-partisan and multi-jurisdictional Canadian response to the COVID-19 pandemic and by the significant measures that have been introduced thus far. This response must continue to remain above partisan politics – the stakes are too high. We applaud the commitment of all elected representatives and urge you to continue to collaborate with provinces and territories at this most crucial and unprecedented time in history.

Reform Judaism is a progressive movement committed to preserving Jewish tradition while embracing diversity and ensuring that we take care of disadvantaged members of our society. Our communal worship is egalitarian and inclusive, and we are deeply committed to the work of “repairing the world”.

We emphasize the importance of ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable in our society be placed at the forefront of our collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jewish tradition teaches us to build a world from compassion (*olam chesed yibaneh*, Psalm 89:3). Our Torah stresses, time and again, our duty to care for the “widow, the orphan, and the stranger”. We know that each and every one of us is made in God’s image, and that we have a duty “to love our neighbour as ourselves”.

We call on the Government of Canada to:

Remove all barriers, means-tests, and other criteria that would delay access to supplemental emergency income by Canadians below the low-income threshold. While significant measures have been announced, the 53% of Canadians who live paycheque to paycheque may still be without income for a month before they see these benefits and that is too long for them to wait.

Provide appropriate interventions in the housing market to ensure no one in Canada loses their housing during the pandemic. We commend new supports to CMHC to allow for mortgage repayment flexibility and call on all levels of government to take more steps to ensure housing security for all in Canada during this crisis, including those among us who are homeless and who are at significant risk.

Maintain Canada’s commitments to migrants and refugees within Canada and throughout the world as they are going to bear the harshest impacts of closed borders. Canada must ensure its ongoing support to asylum seekers and refugees including ensuring access to healthcare and safe options for self-isolation.

Limit the overcrowding of correctional facilities and immigration detention centres, where people are often held in close, crowded, and unsanitary conditions, making them especially vulnerable to the spread of the virus. Appropriate measures must be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission while ensuring that the dignity of those in such facilities is upheld.

Focus on and commit to fighting domestic and gender-based violence, as vulnerable individuals will be at greater risk in physical isolation and quarantine. We appreciate the investment in women’s shelters and sexual assault centres and would implore you to provide those funds as quickly as possible.





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Protect our most vulnerable Indigenous communities that do not have adequate access to health services and supports. While the federal funding announced recently is a start, Indigenous communities are the most vulnerable in the country, and prevention efforts and preparation for critical care must be stepped up now for specific consideration for all northern, remote and isolated communities.

Provide support to social service agencies, faith-based groups, and other charities that help make our society safer and more compassionate. These organizations are an essential part of Canada's social safety net. As the demand for their services increases during this crisis, all levels of government must prioritize support for the non-profit sector as an essential element of economic stimulus and social welfare.

These are some of the measures our Government can take during this crisis to ensure that no resident of Canada is left behind. Our sages teach that "one who saves a single life, saves the world" ([Talmud Sanhedrin 37:11](#)).

Our own communities are actively working to maintain social care and connection through this period of physical distancing. We stand ready to assist in any way we can – to partner at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels to help. From our tradition, this is not a choice, but an imperative.

With gratitude to you and all those in service right now to "flatten the curve" – medical professionals, civil servants, political leaders, teachers, parents, faith leaders, the media, those keeping essential services from mail to pharmacies running, and neighbours helping each other out.

L'shalom (with peace),

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