



**Oral presentation: Strengthening the Poverty Reduction Act and the National Housing Strategy Act**

**House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance regarding Bill C-97, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2019 and other measures**

**May 8, 2019**

## **1. About United Way Centraide Canada**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Bill C-97. My name is Anita Khanna and I am the National Director of Public Policy and Government Relations at United Way Centraide Canada.

We are a federated network of United Way Centraide member offices serving more than 5,000 communities across Canada. In 2019, our movement is marking our 100th year. Across Canada, United Ways and Centraides engage Canadians through our network of individual donors, service agencies and labour and business partners in order to make poverty and exclusion unignorable.

Today, United Way Centraide is an essential part of Canada's social fabric. We inject half a billion dollars into important social programs annually, making strategic investments that are based on local evidence.

## **2. The PRA and NHSA are Social Policy Milestones**

My remarks today focus on Division 19 and 20, the National Housing Strategy Act and the Poverty Reduction Act. Each proposed act is an important social policy milestone for Canada. They represent history in the making and we must get them right for this and future generations.

Strong evidence shows that federal leadership on housing and poverty is essential to building strong communities. This is why we actively drew on our national network of local experts to ground our policy recommendations for the poverty and national housing strategies. We are pleased that the

PRA and NHSA include many of United Way Centraide Canada's recommendations.

### **3. Recommendations**

United Way Centraide local members are leaders in evidence-based community investment for lasting social change and impact. As such, we have proposed changes to strengthen the housing and poverty strategies.

Most recently, we sent a letter to Minister Morneau calling for amendments to clarify and strengthen the Human Rights elements of Division 19, the housing legislation. These included:

- Clear recognition of housing as a human right
- Outlining a clear monitoring role for the housing council
- Mandating the Housing Advocate to receive and investigate petitions identifying systemic housing rights issues

We believe these, and the other amendments outlined in the distributed letter sent to Minister Morneau, will strengthen the human rights accountability of the NHSA. These are necessary to align with Canada's human rights commitments but also to truly begin to establish Canada as a world leader in legislating the progressive realization of the right to housing.

Within the poverty reduction act in Division 20, we welcome the elements specified: targets, timelines, robust measurement and the advisory council. In the spirit of continuous improvement, UWCC recommends the following amendments:

- Strengthening the over-arching target of the PRS, outlined in 6(b) so that the stated goal of the legislation is to end poverty. The current 50% reduction in poverty aligns with the minimum standard of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Given Canada has met its 20% poverty reduction target ahead of schedule, we urge the government to adopt a more ambitious orientation.
- Further, in section 11, the PRA currently calls for the dissolution of the national advisory council on poverty once the "Minister is of the opinion that the level of poverty in Canada has been reduced by 50% below the level of poverty in 2015." Given the ultimate goal we have outlined for the elimination of poverty, we call for the removal of this clause so the council continues its work until poverty is eliminated.
- Our final recommendation also relates to the national advisory council on poverty. We are extremely pleased to see the council positioned as an independent body, with a membership reflecting the diversity of Canada.

We believe that the council's resourcing will ultimately determine its independence.

Looking back at the experience of the National Welfare Council, we note that it was eliminated by the stroke of a budgetary pen.

For this council to avoid the same fate, it must have an independent source of income sufficient to meet its mandate on an ongoing basis. This could be done, for example, through the creation of a dedicated endowment fund. To guarantee public accountability and efficient management, we further propose that the council be subject to the financial oversight of the Auditor General.



#### **4. Closing Remarks**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important process. United Way is ever committed to working with all parties and our business, labour and community partners to build stronger, more prosperous communities for all.