

December 10, 2019

The Honourable Josephine Pon

Minister of Seniors and Housing
Office of the Minister
404 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Re: Phasing out of the Seniors Advocate Role

Delivered by e-mail and Registered mail

Dear Minister Pon:

ARTA (Alberta Retired Teachers' Association) is an organization of over 24,000 retired teachers and like-minded professionals. Our members support an engaged lifestyle after retirement.

ARTA members were very pleased when the Alberta Government announced the creation of a Seniors Advocate in Alberta. The government was focusing on seniors and their unique needs, with a mandate to assist seniors in the areas of health, accommodation, finance, as well as a myriad of other senior related matters. When the announcement came that the newly elected government is now phasing out that role and placing that mandate under the direction of the Alberta Health Advocate, we were very concerned.

The government's belief that the new combined office will serve seniors well is a belief that we do not share. Seniors have unique needs and issues, and the role of the Health Advocate does not necessarily encompass these unique needs. Senior's issues run deeper than health alone - accommodation, finance and navigating a complex system are additional obstacles that Alberta seniors need assistance to overcome.

To illustrate our view, look to the province of British Columbia. The Seniors Advocate in that province is the most effective in Canada, reporting on long-term care facilities across the province, wait times for those facilities and how those times compare to provincial targets. Alberta's advocate should have those powers. The government should be promoting the Seniors Advocate to an independent officer of the legislature.

Instead of elimination of the Senior Advocate office, we believe you should look to the connection of the offices of the Health and Senior advocates. This move would provide much better support for seniors as well as consolidating services. The health of seniors is a major topic of concern; therefore, working together just makes sense.

We believe it is important that this government support the growing demographic of a seniors' population. Our association calls for you to re-institute the role of the Seniors Advocate, ensuring that seniors in Alberta are cared for. The expected savings of \$500,000 a year is not a good enough reason to cancel the Senior Advocate's role. We believe now is the time to invest in programs to assist seniors to ensure that they can live an engaged lifestyle after retirement. That is where you will see a very substantial savings.

We are here if you would like to have a sounding board for any proposed changes you are contemplating that affect the lives of the seniors of Alberta. Our years of experience and dedication to Alberta seniors could serve you well as you contemplate change.

May we all work together to ensure that the best possible outcome for Alberta seniors is at the forefront of every decision made.

Sincerely yours,



Lorna McIlroy, President
Alberta Retired Teachers Association

CC. The Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier
The Honourable Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health
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