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Newfoundland and Labrador
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May 30, 2023

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson P.C., M.P.
Minister of Natural Resources
House of Commons
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Green Buildings Strategy an opportunity to address energy poverty and health inequities

Dear Minister:

We urge you to ensure that the upcoming Green Buildings Strategy reduces energy poverty and health inequities while also meeting the net-zero emissions objectives for the building sector in Canada.

Energy efficiency programs can improve health and health equity. A broad range of negative health outcomes, including asthma, respiratory infections, and premature deaths, can result from extreme temperatures, pest infestations, mould contamination, and exposure to indoor air pollution. Older populations, those with pre-existing health conditions, and people living in crowded and materially deprived conditions are at greatest risk. A number of intervention studies have found that energy efficiency retrofits can improve the quality of indoor environments and improve overall health, respiratory health, and mental health.

Energy efficiency programs can reduce energy poverty. Almost one in ten households in Canada live in energy poverty (i.e., spend more than 6% of their income on energy). Energy poverty may force some households to choose between the energy needed to heat their homes and other essentials such as healthy food, clothing, and medicine. Energy efficiency programs designed to meet the needs of low-income populations can make energy more affordable for those facing energy poverty and improve the health of some of the most vulnerable populations in Canada, while also reducing climate emissions.

Building retrofit programs can strengthen climate resiliency as well as energy efficiency. There are a number of changes in buildings and building operations that can be adopted to mitigate health risks

associated with climate-related extreme events such as heat waves, extreme cold, floods, and wildfires. These measures can help avert adverse health impacts while reducing financial costs, disruption, and mental health stress that can result from property damage.

Current energy efficiency programs are not reaching low-to-moderate income Canadians who cannot afford the upfront costs associated with them. The proposed Green Buildings Strategy must be amended to address those gaps. Changes can be implemented most rapidly and effectively by coordinating with existing regional programs. Every province in Canada has some existing program delivery capabilities through utilities, provincial governments, or municipalities. These programs can be strengthened with federal guidance and funding that aims to:

- Meaningfully cut energy bills by producing deeper energy savings;
- Encourage fuel shifting from oil and natural gas to efficient heat pumps that can provide protection from extreme heat and cold while also deeply cutting climate emissions;
- Address barriers that prevent energy efficiency upgrades from happening in housing for low-income populations (e.g., mould remediation);
- Design the programs to address the funding needs of low-to-moderate income populations by eliminating upfront retrofit costs; and
- Include retrofits that increase climate resilience (e.g., fire-resistant roofing).

Your truly,



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