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December 2, 2015

The Honourable John McCallum
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister McCallum,

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), I would like to extend our sincere congratulations on your recent election and appointment as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

As background for you, for 89 years CASW has been the national association voice for social work in Canada, with the dual mission of strengthening the profession and advancing issues of social justice. To this end, CASW is very optimistic that your government will deliver on the platform promise of real change

CASW is extremely supportive government's commitment to bringing 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada. Social Workers, with an ethical obligation to uphold the dignity and worth of all people and working in diverse sectors across the country, are uniquely positioned to help welcome and settle asylum seekers. CASW commits its resources and networks of support to this momentous humanitarian effort.

CASW vigorously advocated against the previous administration's drastic cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) that limited essential health care for refugee claimants. Consequently we are extremely pleased at your government's commitment to completely reverse the IFHP cuts and urge swift action before the first wave of Syrian refugees arrive in our country: restoring Canada's status as a caring, compassionate, and welcoming country.

CASW was also deeply disappointed that the previous administration's decision to fundamentally alter its relationship with the provinces and territories specific to social assistance for refugee claimants by allowing provinces and territories to impose a minimum residency requirement on refugees to access social assistance. CASW agrees with by Federal Court Judge Anne Mactavish, who noted that the changes constitute "cruel and unusual" treatment, puts lives at risk and "outrages Canadian standards of decency."

This change also altered the one accountability measure tied to the Canada Social Transfer. CASW respectfully asks for your government to make repealing the ability of the provinces and territories to impose minimum residency requirements for refugees to receive social assistance.

Finally, specific to our profession, each March is designated as National Social Work Month – a time for social workers gather to celebrate the profession and focus our advocacy efforts in support of real social change. In this regard, please accept this letter as a request to meet, preferably in March, however at your convenience, to further discuss our shared priorities in building a more vibrant and more equitable Canada.

Again, on behalf of the CASW federation, I extend our sincere congratulations on your election and subsequent appointment as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. We look forward to supporting progress in re-establishing Canada's standing in the world as an open, accepting and compassionate country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Morel Caissie".

Morel Caissie, MSW, RSW
President, CASW