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STEPHANIE KUSIE, M.P.
CALGARY MIDNAPORE

16 April 2020

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
140 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0J9

Dear Minister Hussen,

I would like to bring to your attention that since the closure of Service Canada Centres, many Canadians are experiencing extremely long wait times when attempting to access Service Canada over the phone. This lack of access to phone support from Service Canada is disproportionately impacting seniors and rural Canadians and preventing many from accessing the government benefits they depend on.

Many seniors are unfamiliar with online platforms or have difficulty using technology and rely on in-person assistance. Canadians living in rural areas also heavily rely on visiting Service Canada centres or over-the-phone support due to unreliable internet speeds and service.

The government has a responsibility to provide all Canadians with timely access to Service Canada so that they can receive the government services and benefits that they rely on. Many individuals have unique questions and special circumstances which prevent them from applying online. These Canadians need assistance applying for these benefits but, it has become virtually impossible to speak with a Service Canada agent.

I want to also express my appreciation for the hard work that our public servants are continuing to do during this pandemic. The government must ensure that they receive the appropriate support they need in order to stay healthy and safe, as they continue their important work to help Canadians.

The Government of Canada has a responsibility to assist Canadians so that they can access their benefits without delay. At a time when millions of Canadians are facing unprecedented hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these gaps in service are unacceptable. Your government must address these challenges now that Service Canada Centres have been closed and over-the-phone support is the only source of information for many Canadians. Therefore, I hope that you can provide Canadians answers to these important questions:

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- Is the Government of Canada considering establishing local Service Canada phone numbers so that Canadians have the option to speak with a local Service Canada agent?
- Have all Service Canada employees been provided adequate equipment and network access so they can continue to perform their duties remotely while Centres are closed?
- Has the government hired additional Service Canada employees to keep up with the new demand? If so, how many new employees?
- Have public servants from other departments been shifted to Service Canada to meet the new demand? If so, how many public servants have been transferred and for how long will they fill these positions?

I hope you can keep me updated on these issues; I will look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie Kusie".

Stephanie Kusie
Shadow Minister for Families, Children and Social Development
Member of Parliament for Calgary Midnapore