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January 24, 2025

The Honourable Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs
E: HMA.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Honourable Minister Ravi Kahlon,

The British Columbia Association of Social Workers congratulates you on your appointment to the portfolio of Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs. We are writing to you to follow up on our March 2024 letter regarding changes to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program. We appreciated your response which highlighted a number of improvements your government planned to make to the program.

As you noted in your letter, low-income seniors are struggling with increased living and rental costs. As social workers we know that access to adequate housing is an important determinant of overall health. We are aware of data from the BC Seniors Advocate which indicates that there may be eligible seniors who have not applied to SAFER although they could benefit from the program. We, therefore, urge you to launch the planned public awareness campaign about the program as soon as possible.

We also note that, although they have increased, the income limit and the rent ceiling are both too low, given the rising cost of living, particularly for housing in British Columbia. We hope you will consider the Green party's recommendations to raise the income limit to \$45,000 for a single person and \$50,000 for a couple. Finally, we encourage you to raise the subsidy level to ensure that no senior pays more than 30% of their income for housing. Annual review of these amounts and thresholds will ensure seniors don't fall farther behind.

As low-income seniors struggle with rising rents, higher food prices, and other inflationary pressures, the SAFER program presents an opportunity to ensure low-income seniors remain adequately housed. We, therefore, urge your government to adopt these enhancements as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fiona".

Fiona Lewis, MSW

Chair, Health Advocacy Committee
BC Association of Social Workers