{Insert date}

Dear {insert MLA’s title and name},

I write this letter as a concerned social worker as well as a constituent. I am very concerned about the impact of the heat wave on the vulnerable populations of BC.

As you are aware, in June of 2021 British Columbia experienced a heat dome with temperatures across the province reaching as high as 49.6°C. The BC Coroners Report stated that in BC, between June 18 and August 12, 2021, there were 595 heat-related deaths. Most deaths (526) occurred during the period of June 25 to July 1. Of those who died, 69% were 70 years of age or older.

Much research highlights the scope and impact of heat waves. While it is clear that heat waves affect the health and well being of many, their impact is felt most strongly by people who are already at risk: older people, people with disabilities and people with chronic health conditions. The risks are increased by poverty, as low-income housing can often be small and poorly ventilated spaces with inadequate air flow and little access to outdoor space. As well, many long-term care facilities do not have air conditioners in resident rooms and some have no air conditioning at all. Psychosocial factors such as social isolation have also been found to be associated with higher risks due to heat, particularly for the elderly.

The lack of an effective and timely government response to the heat wave caused many of the most vulnerable people in BC to suffer physically and emotionally and resulted in many preventable deaths.

While this event was unprecedented, it was not unpredicted. In 2017, the BC Centre for Disease Control wrote “Municipal Heat Response Planning in British Columbia, Canada” and in 2019 the BC Government wrote “Preliminary Strategic Climate Risk Assessment for British Columbia”. In this report, it was stated that a heat wave of at least 3 days that affects human health is expected to happen every 11 to 50 years.

As summer approaches and with it the risk of another heat wave, it is time to act to prevent the heartbreaking consequences from occurring again. I urge you to work with your colleagues to take action on the many short- and long-term strategies that have been proposed to mitigate the risks of extreme heat events due to climate change: e.g., access to air conditioning, increased public access to water, increasing capacity for shade trees, promoting passive building design features to keep buildings cool, connecting vulnerable neighbourhoods with heat-mitigation programs.

Please act now to ensure that the most vulnerable in our province are safe and protected.

Regards,

name and address