

March 25, 2020

Dr. Robert Strang  
Chief Medical Officer of Health-NS  
PO Box 488  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2R8

Ms. Tracey Taweel  
Deputy Minister, DSC NS  
5675 Spring Garden Road, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Nelson Place  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

**Sent via email:** [Tracey.Taweel@novascotia.ca](mailto:Tracey.Taweel@novascotia.ca) [Robert.Strang@novascotia.ca](mailto:Robert.Strang@novascotia.ca)

Dear Ms. Taweel and Dr. Strang:

**Re: People with Disabilities and Covid 19 Response**

We are writing to you with our urgent concerns for Nova Scotians living with disabilities during this pandemic with a request to bring together public health experts, those responsible for DCS funded institutions, and community members to move forward in identifying and implementing health protections for people with disabilities.

We recognize the tireless work of the Nova Scotia government to effectively manage this crisis. We also recognize that in this time there is a need to bring together all the resources, both community based and government, to fully collaborate in finding creative solutions to the issues facing people with disabilities.

Although we recognize the important health measures that have been taken, and the reasoning behind excluding the almost 900 disabled Nova Scotians who are currently institutionalized in Department of Community Services funded institutions from physical distancing and other requirements of the March 23 *Health Protection Act* order, the prohibition on visitors will not help if one person becomes infected. The research has shown that people in such institutional

settings similar to nursing homes remain at high risk - we just have to look at the nursing home in Washington State to see what can happen if a staff who is ill comes to work .

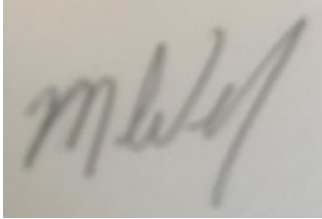
In this time of Covid 19 crisis, the barrier for those who wish to move to community, remains the planning and resources necessary to provide people with disabilities who could live in community with the appropriate community based supports and services.

In order to safeguard the health of these 900 individuals, many of whom have underlying health conditions that would place them at very high risk of dying from Covid 19, and for the health of the whole province, we urgently request that public health and DCS take the following steps:

- 1) Initiate immediate consultation with stakeholders, including disabled Nova Scotians, their allies and family members and disability rights advocates to implement measures consistent with the Province's Covid 19 health directives for persons with disabilities in institutional and community based settings.
- 2) Implement full transparency around the Covid 19 protocols to protect the health and lives of people with disabilities currently living and who will, at least in the short-term, continue to live in Department of Community Services funded large institutional settings and that these protocols, and the mechanisms to ensure their compliance, be publicly announced and regularly updated, including a plan for those who become infected that allows for their care by staff with safeguards for other residents and staff.
- 3) Consistent with public health directives, the Department of Community Services be provided with the financial and other resources necessary to move as many people as possible out of congregate institutional settings to community based settings – with appropriate supports and services. This will allow for physical distancing and other provincial health directives to be implemented for people with disabilities. Put simply, the risk of infection to people living in congregate institutional settings requires urgent action.
- 4) The government provide the necessary resources to ensure that community based organizations are able to provide supports and services to persons with disabilities who live in the community during this time of social distancing and isolation. All the barriers that these individuals face on a daily basis—to transportation, to employment, to food and financial security, to housing, to personal support, to health care, to education and information etc. are being magnified many times during this time of crisis. A great deal is already being done at the grassroots level, but this crisis requires government resources and leadership.

We look forward to hearing from you to assist in implementing these recommendations and to participating in a virtual meeting within the next few days, and have included both my email contact and cell phone number below for this purpose.

Sincerely,

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Marty Wexler'.

Marty Wexler  
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