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January 13, 2021

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care
6th Floor, 400 University Avenue
Toronto, ON M5G 1S5
merrilee.fullerton@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Fullerton,

On April 28, 2020, we wrote to the Ontario government, expressing the deep concerns of RTOERO's 81,000 members regarding the tragedy in long-term residential care during the first wave of Covid-19. In our original letter, we proposed specific evidence-based actions. We joined other concerned Canadians in urging the following immediate action:

- Limiting staff to working in only one nursing home
- Increasing wages, job security and benefits for staff, especially sick leave
- Testing all those living in, working in, or visiting nursing homes or long-term care

Now, more than eight months later, the above recommendations have received only cursory attention by your government and, in large measure, will only begin to be addressed over the next four years. Meanwhile, the tragedy in long-term residential care has accelerated during the second wave of Covid-19. We see no realistic measures in place to save Ontario's most vulnerable elders.

According to your government's data (data.ontario.ca/dataset/long-term-care-home-covid-19-data) as of Jan. 10, 2021, the tragedy in long-term care is accelerating:

- 252 LTC homes are in outbreak
- 1,502 resident active cases
- 1,260 staff active cases
- 1,132 deaths during this second wave

It appears the vaccine implementation is proceeding at a glacial pace, while every day more long-term care residents and staff are becoming infected and dying.

According to Nathan Stall, noted specialist in geriatrics at University of Toronto, "The current vaccine roll-out in Ontario is failing due to a lack of transparency, poor communications to frontline providers and insufficient supports for those seeking vaccinations. Financial and logistical barriers are preventing healthcare workers from getting vaccinated."





In the strongest terms possible, we urge you to focus the resources of your ministry and the Ontario government on immediate action to speed COVID-19 vaccination and to curb rates of infection and death.

At the same time, despite the dire need for short-term action to turn the tide of this crisis, we advise your ministry and government to be mindful of the need for profound and enduring transformation of our approach to caring for older adults. Your ministry must enact policies and programs that enable Ontarians to age at home and in communities and to retain their independence as long as possible.

Community-based solutions are key to solving the crisis in long-term care. Yet, almost nine of every 10 dollars go to institutional care – and only one dollar in 10 is spent on care based in the home and community. We spend significantly less on home and community care than the OECD average.

We note that your government has not yet considered Bill 196, Seniors' Advocate Act, which would establish an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly to serve as Seniors Advocate. This much-needed advocacy role already exists in other provinces. We urge your government to move swiftly to enact this vital legislation.

RTOERO and its 81,000 members look to you and the Ontario government for compassionate leadership and immediate action for long-term care settings. Our members need you and your Cabinet colleagues to act with courage and conviction. Act to provide immediate funding and direct, positive intervention to save the lives of our treasured Ontario elders and the dedicated staff caregivers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rich Prophet".

Rich Prophet
Chair of the Board

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Grieve".

Jim Grieve
Chief Executive Officer

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