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April 18, 2020

Matt Jeneroux, M.P.
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Matt.jeneroux@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Jeneroux,

Re: Input for a healthy return to Parliament

Thank you for reaching out to healthcare and public health professionals to seek input on how Parliamentarians might be able to return to the House of Commons for debate in the coming days and weeks. Like many Canadians, we are all facing unprecedented challenges adapting to the new reality of virtual and at-home workspaces. While we understand the need for Parliament to resume its important work, we would strongly caution against any in-person meetings. We would encourage all Parliamentarians to follow the guidance set out by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), including recommendations concerning meetings and mass gatherings.

We encourage the House of Commons to continue to seek and explore technological solutions to conducting Parliamentary business. This is a time for Parliamentarians to lead by example and continue to demonstrate to Canadians the need to physically distance ourselves from others, stay home and follow PHAC guidance — all with a common goal of flattening the curve of COVID-19.

While we firmly encourage Parliamentarians to continue to work virtually, if this cannot be done and in-person meetings must take place, we have a list of considerations (below). Please keep in mind that all recommendations and decisions regarding in-person meetings should be further discussed and planned with PHAC.

Considerations for meeting in-person:

- All those participating should be sequestered/quarantined in a single hotel;
- Participants should have no interactions with the public, maintain a 2-metre distance with all other participants, and limit contact to those in the workplace;
- Maintain a 2-metre distance for meals, nutrition breaks, and washroom facilities;
- Do not permit in-person media scrums;

- Daily screening of all participants;
- Excuse Pages and other non-operational staff from participating. Only essential staff should be present with support staff using remote technology;
- Appropriate unions should be consulted;
- Follow physical distancing guidance of 2-metres or more;
- Daily screening of all participants at entry and not allowed entry should there be any symptoms (including typical and atypical COVID-19 symptoms);
- Display cautionary signage in visible, high-traffic areas, that includes instructions on properly washing your hands and a reminder to do so frequently; respiratory etiquette (cough/sneeze into sleeve); signage should also include information about symptoms and reminders that if unwell, not to participate, self-isolate, and contact public health;
- Put in place proper sanitization procedures — clean cellphones, tablets and laptops frequently (provide alcohol swabs for screens); place alcohol-based hand sanitizer at all points of entry and exit, throughout the building and at each participant’s desk or work area;
- At minimum, daily cleaning of the House of Commons, including a thorough sanitization of doors, desks, chairs, switches, microphones and all high-traffic areas; ensure cleaning staff are also properly prepared and equipped;
- Ensure all participants and organizers contact details are provided and state that their details will be shared with local public health authorities if they fall ill or if they are determined to have been in contact with someone who was ill; anyone who does not agree to this condition cannot attend the meetings;
- Reduce in-person interactions of staff (security, translators, cleaners, etc.) who provide essential services during parliamentary sittings by reducing the number of staff required, staggering shifts and allowing those who can, to work virtually;
- Wear an appropriate non-medical mask when there is a possibility of being in areas where there are other people and where the 2-metre distance is not possible;
- Ensure there are closed bins for hygienically disposing of used tissues and masks;
- Develop and approve a response plan in case someone at the meeting becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19. This plan should include but not necessarily limited to:
 - The identification of a room or area where someone who is feeling unwell or has symptoms can be safely isolated;
 - Detailed steps for safe transfer from the isolation room to a healthcare facility;
 - An established protocol if a participant or service provider tests positive for COVID-19 during or after the meeting; and,
 - Advance coordination with Ottawa Public Health.
- Inform participants traveling back and forth from Ottawa that they should follow their provincial or territorial guidance on self-isolation after each trip, as required;
- Establish protocols for safe travel (air, rail, taxi, car, etc.) both to and from the House of Commons; and,
- Ensure robust public messaging about why and how Parliament is resuming, including clear communication about how it is essential to protect the interest of the public and should not be interpreted as a lessening of public health directives regarding physical distancing and the elimination of non-essential travel.

Returning to work is something that should not be taken lightly, and all precautions must be taken. While we

have listed some considerations, the most important consideration should be the following: what is the potential health threat posed by the resumption of in-person Parliamentary meetings to Canadians if a Parliamentarian/s or other meeting participant/s contract COVID-19 and unknowingly enters a public space? Measures to minimize any and all future outbreaks of COVID-19 must be at the forefront of all decision-making processes.

We reiterate our recommendation that all technological solutions be explored before conducting in-person meetings. We stand behind PHAC's guidance on mass gatherings and do not recommend in-person meetings. We must all work to minimize the spread of COVID-19, and all Canadians must continue to adapt during these unprecedented times, including Parliamentarians.

Sincerely,



Michael Villeneuve, RN, M.Sc., FAAN
Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Nurses Association



Dr. Sandy Buchman, MD CCFP (PC) FCFP
President, Canadian Medical Association



Ian Culbert
Executive Director, Canadian Public Health Association



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cc: Pablo Rodriguez, M.P., Liberal House Leader
Candice Bergen, M.P., Conservative House Leader
Alain Therrien, M.P., Bloc Quebecois House Leader
Peter Julian, M.P., New Democratic House Leader