

Federal Leaders Must Take Decisive Supportive Stance on CERB Repayment Amnesty For All Struggling in Low Income Throughout the Pandemic

TORONTO – Campaign 2000 calls on all federal leaders to take a stand in support of all low income people in Canada who have faced economic hardship before and during the pandemic by supporting a broad repayment amnesty for those who received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) but were later deemed ineligible.

“The federal government’s roll out of individual emergency income supports in March must be applauded,” says Leila Sarangi, National Coordinator for Campaign 2000. “This move no doubt was a lifeline for thousands of people living on low income. Now it’s time for the Prime Minister and all federal party leaders to decisively support a CERB repayment amnesty for anyone living in low income who received the benefit but who were found to be ineligible after the fact.”

Campaign 2000 urges all federal party leaders to support the following repayment amnesty recommendations:

- Immediate implementation of a CERB repayment amnesty for individuals whose annual total income for 2020 is \$30,000 or less, two person families whose total income is \$45,000 or less, three person families whose total income is \$50,000 or less, with larger families receiving amnesty based on the total income Census Family Low Income Measure (After Tax) threshold that applies to their family size.
- Fair reduced repayment plans for those whose annual income is above but close to these low-income thresholds.

“Forcing the most vulnerable to repay CERB will have long term and devastating impacts, particularly on those who are low-income, racialized, Indigenous, disabled, and gendered, all of whom faced pre-existing inequities in the labour market, characterized by lower income precarity to start,” says Shalini Konaur, Executive Director of the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO). “These groups have been among the hardest hit during the pandemic. To force repayment of emergency benefits now is unreasonably excessive.”

“The federal government is stepping on its own toes while attacking Canada’s poor. At the same time that it praises its own Poverty Reduction Strategy as lifting more than 1 million Canadians out of poverty, it is driving hundreds of thousands of Canadians into deeper poverty by clawing back the Canada Emergency Response Benefit from those living below or near the poverty line,” says Sid Frankel, University of Manitoba. “This is not only irrational, but shameful because these desperate people were responding to unclear eligibility requirements and a government that encouraged them to apply.”

The vastly different provincial/territorial treatment of the CERB for social assistance clients and those receiving rent subsidies has also compounded regional inequities. For social assistance clients who are deemed ineligible to receive CERB, repaying the CERB and the length of repayment plans will deepen their poverty for years to come.

“The federal government should stop lashing out at the poor and accept that it played a major role in the eligibility confusion, as well as a major role in creating an interjurisdictional administrative nightmare,” says Stella Lord, member of the Nova Scotia Action Coalition for Community Wellbeing. “There are major concerns that the CRA will start to clawback federal benefits for people living on low income who received the CERB in error, and who’ve been asked to repay. These benefits are essential to reducing poverty.”

Campaign 2000 also urges all federal leaders to ensure that repayment plans will not include any penalties for any



CERB recipients deemed ineligible outside of specific fraudulent behaviour already addressed by existing CRA legislation.

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Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, pan-Canada network of 120+ national, provincial, territorial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty, hosted by Family Service Toronto. For more information, visit <http://www.campaign2000.ca>.

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