

Coast to Coast to Coast Support for Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) Repayment Amnesty

TORONTO – People across Canada are supportive of a broad repayment amnesty for anyone living on low incomes, according to a Campaign 2000 [petition](#) presented to the House of Commons today.

The petition, signed by people living in nearly every jurisdiction in the country, called on the government to implement a repayment amnesty for all people who received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) whose incomes are below or just above the poverty line, and for all youth transitioning out of care, regardless of eligibility to receive the benefit.

“The CERB was not intended to be a poverty reduction tool, but that’s exactly what it did. The federal government should be applauded for taking quick action in a time of crisis and delivering this low-barrier benefit to people who needed it,” says Leila Sarangi, National Coordinator of Campaign 2000. “Not only is it cruel to ask for money back from those living on low incomes who took and used the benefit for what it was meant to be used for, but it goes against the government’s own goals to reduce poverty.”

According to analysis published in April 2021 by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, over 200,000 people will be pushed below the poverty line as a result of having to pay taxes on the CERB. Recently released Statistics Canada data on the demographic characteristics of CERB recipients shows that the income support offered through CERB was particularly important for First Nations, Inuit, Métis Peoples, racialized, gendered, young people and people living on low incomes, all of whom have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CERB amnesty advocates are also calling for clarity on how crucial government benefits received by people living on low incomes, such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), will be impacted by a one-time annual increase to their incomes due to receiving the CERB.

“Having to pay taxes on the CERB, or pay it back altogether, while also seeing a reduction in income, will be devastating for families living close to and below the poverty line, and will create undue hardship,” says Sarangi. “Income transfers like the CCB have helped to lift thousands of children out of poverty. We must take what we learned during the pandemic and improve income supports, not reduce them.”

Campaign 2000 calls on Deputy Minister Freeland, Minister Qualtrough, Minister LeBouthillier to implement a CERB repayment amnesty immediately, and for all Members of Parliament to advocate for a repayment amnesty in order to advance an equitable, inclusive pandemic recovery.

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Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-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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