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The Honourable John Haggie
Minister of Health and Community Services
1st Floor, West Block, Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
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Dear Minister,

My name is Noah Irvine, a grade 12 student from Guelph Ontario. I am writing to all health ministers across the country to advocate for the creation of mental health and addictions ministries at the federal, provincial and territorial levels. I have an interest in this area because 12 years ago I lost my mother to suicide and then two years ago I lost my father to a prescription drug overdose. My mother was just 24 years of age and my father had recently turned 40.

I have taken up this cause because it affects thousands of Canadians, including the people of your province or territory. I wrote a letter in February of 2017 to all 336 sitting members of parliament. At around the same time, I wrote to six Ontario MPPs, including Premier Kathleen Wynne. Six months later I had received only 40 responses. So, I took to the media to push for action from those who had not written back to me. In those letters I called for government action on mental health and suicide prevention. I am writing you because this issues affects everyone in your province or territory and the country's indigenous communities.

On August 23, I met with the Prime Minister's Office for approximately 90 minutes to discuss the failings of our mental health system and the creation of a mental health and addictions secretariat within the PMO. The secretariat would ensure that mental health and addictions have a national focus and the attention of the highest levels of the federal government. On September 21, I meet with federal Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor. While she was unable to make a commitment to a secretariat, she was very interested and said she would take the idea forward to her cabinet and caucus colleagues. On Oct. 4, I received a phone call from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to discuss my letter to MPs. The Prime Minister thought a secretariat was worth considering and encouraged me to continue with my advocacy. I'm curious to see what the next federal budget has to say about a mental health and addictions secretariat in the PMO.

On September 13, I publicly supported Ontario bill 149 which would create the Ontario Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. In Ontario, 11 ministries fund in some capacity or another a level of mental health care. Those ministries in turn fund hundreds of uncoordinated agencies and services. This is not an effective way to deal with the mental health issues in the province of Ontario.

This bill was spearer-headed by Ontario NDP health critic France Gelin. The bill will implement the unanimous recommendations of an all party select committee report. That select committee report was tabled seven years ago. Due to the inaction of the Government of Ontario, major recommendations in the report have been ignored and effectively thrown in the garbage. The first recommendation of the committee was the creation of one government body to deal solely with mental health and addictions. This is why I stood in support of a bill that will bring all funding and resources into one central location.

I'm a non-partisan supporter of the bill in large part because it is based on unanimous recommendations of Liberal, Conservative and New Democratic members of the Ontario legislature. I've been told that it

was one of the few times all parties agreed on an issue. It was a collaborative and cooperative effort. We need that same unity across Canada to deal with mental health and addictions

Since the report was tabled, around 7,000 Ontarians have died due to suicide alone. According to a Globe and Mail report titled "Time to bolster Canada's chronically underfunded mental health system," 1,000 Ontarians die from suicide each year. In B.C. there's almost an 88% increase in overdose related deaths from this time last year. The number of overdose deaths in the province is roughly 3.7 every day. That's more than 1,000 deaths in a year.

The percentage of incarcerated people struggling with mental health or addictions is startling. The select committee report into mental health and addictions stated "36% of all incarcerated people in Ontario have a mental illness". Also 50% of the total incarcerated population in Canada have an addiction issue. Locking up the mentally ill is not working. It is not how we should be treating our people in the 21st century. Our judicial system and dealing with the mentally ill is a sickening reminder of how we as a country are still failing.

During the war in Afghanistan, 158 Canadian soldiers were killed in the line of duty. What many do not know is that since Canada withdrew from the conflict in 2014, 58 soldiers have come home and ended their lives. It is unacceptable for our country to abandon our veterans when they have sacrificed so much for our country.

We know as a country, we must do better. You know as health minister you must do better. You have been elected and appointed to protect the lives of the people in your province. Will you sit by and watch as families are ripped apart by the inaction of governments?

Ontario Health Minister Eric Hoskins said in the legislature on Sept. 13, "...the entire country recognizes that our efforts as a nation have not been adequate or sufficient, whether it's the federal government, whether it's the individual provincial governments, territorial governments, municipal governments."

I was 15 when I became an orphan. I believe that no child in this country or in your province or territory should lose both parents due to government inaction. While it's probably not on the agenda for the upcoming meeting of federal and provincial health ministers, I hope you will find time for informal chats about centralizing mental health and addiction services at the provincial, federal, territorial and indigenous levels of government.

Do not let another child lose a parent — let alone two — because mental health and addiction services are poorly structured and coordinated. Do not let my parents' deaths become just another example of government inaction. Let them be a reason for action.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to speaking with you.

It's time to step up and do better.

Regards,

Noah Irvine

cc:

Pamela Goldsmith-Jones
Lloyd Longfield
Harold Albrecht
Elizabeth Sandals
Minister

