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June 2, 2018

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC  
Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia  
Government House  
1401 Rockland Avenue  
Victoria, BC  
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Your Honour,

My name is Noah Irvine, a resident of Guelph, Ontario, and an 18-year-old high school student. I am writing to share with you my story of loss and advocacy. In 2005, I lost my mother to suicide. She was just 24. Then, in 2015, I lost my father to his battle with addictions and mental health issues at the age of 40. These events, as tragic as they may be, inspired me to advocate for better mental health and addictions services in Ontario and across Canada.

In 2017, after much encouragement from my teacher Jill Goodreau, I sent a letter to all 336 Members of Parliament and 6 members of the Ontario Legislature. My letter shared my story of loss and the all-to-common story of inaction by too many governments. I waited months for responses. By June of 2017, I had heard from less than 40 MPs and only 2 MPPs.

This poor response was a disappointment. It highlighted that our elected officials care very little about mental health and addictions. Or, they are not in touch with average Canadians who confront these issues every day. I didn't know what to do next. How could I get my parents' story to the public and hold the government to account?

In August, 2017, I sent a news release to numerous media across Ontario and Canada. I was heartened on August 23, 2017, when Ken Armstrong of GuelphToday.com decided to write a story on myself and my parents. He wrote an absolutely amazing article on the fact that I as a Canadian was being ignored and my parents story meant nothing to the decision makers in the government. Following his story, I quickly gained more attention from local radio station, national news networks such as Global TV and CTV, and international media including Huffington Post, and the BBC. These stories caught the attention of politicians and got them to acknowledge and take responsibility for how they continue to fail to help this country's most vulnerable and overlooked group – the mentally ill.

My campaign takes two approaches, one federally and one provincially. At the federal level, I'm advocating for the establishment of a Secretariat of Mental Health and Addictions in the Prime Minister's Office. This would allow for ongoing dialogue on mental health and addictions at the highest level of government in Canada. At the provincial level, I'm supporting the creation of a

Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction in every province and territory. The centralization of services is critical because people across the country find it impossible to navigate the current complex and fragmented system.

With regards to the secretariat idea, I went to Ottawa and discussed the idea with the Federal Minister of Health and in October I received a call from Prime Minister Trudeau to talk about it. Both agreed that we need to stop working in silos and we need to work together across the country. They also agreed that idea of a secretariat held promise for dealing with the issues of mental health and addictions and deserved further discussion and exploration. In its recent budget, the federal government failed to create a Secretariat for Mental Health and Addictions.

In Ontario, I'm working with MPP France Gelina on Bill 149, an act to create a Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. This Bill would centralize and focus all mental health and addictions services in one area. France's actions are a welcomed change from the cold shoulder I had been receiving from other government officials. France, along with the NDP, recognised me on the floor of the legislature. That was an honour. It demonstrated that some politicians are beginning to understand that major changes have to be made to help those facing mental health and addictions issues. It encouraged me to keep going. (Due to the provincial election, action on the Bill has stopped.)

A quote that has also encouraged to continue with my campaign is a statement that is all so true. Hon. Eric Hoskins, Ontario Minister of Health stated in the legislature on September 13, 2017, "I think the entire country recognises that our efforts as a nation have not been adequate nor sufficient, whether it's the federal governments or the individual provincial governments, territorial governments, municipal governments". If we admit that we have failed, then we have duty to turn those failures into successes. The minister recognised that everyone in position of power in Canada has failed and therefore it is time to act as a nation.

I write you for a couple of reasons. First, I want you – as the person who represents the Crown and has an important role in our democracy -- to know my parents' story and to know it's not an individual story. It is a sad reality for countless Canadians. It is a sad reality that almost 4,000 Canadians die by suicide each year. It is a sad reality that we look at lives that have been taken so early as just statistics. It is a sad reality that so many Canadians, like my mom and dad, continue to suffer in silence. It is a sad reality that prisons have become our largest providers of mental health services. It is a reality that children in this country are ignored by the people who are supposed to represent all of Canada no matter where they are from in this country, or in the Province of British Columbia.

I know there's not much you can do to change the mental health and addictions system. However, from this day forward, in knowing my story, by knowing that there are other kids like me, and by knowing other families have experienced the same heart break and tragedy will you discuss mental health at every opportunity to eliminate the silence and stigma? I would like you to remember, when you go and meet the people of this country, or the people of British Columbia, or any other province, understand that no matter where you are in this great country, people have experienced so much loss from this epidemic. Yet, they show unbelievable amounts

of courage each and every day to make our country better and to fix the broken and fragmented mental health system.

By taking every opportunity to open the conversation on mental health and addictions you will make British Columbia a stronger province, Canada a stronger country, and give strength to those who need it most.

I appreciate the time you have given my letter.

Regards

Noah Irvine