

The Catholic Women's League of Canada
Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council

Independent Seniors' Advocate Provincial Initiative

MEMO

UPDATE ON SENIORS' ADVOCATE PETITION

“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

ACTION

- ❖ Pray to the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Good Counsel to bless our actions
- ❖ Fill out the reporting sheet and send to Judy L. The report form has been posted.
- ❖ Set up a time in the last two weeks of September to meet with your MLA and give them the original petitions
- ❖ Send copies of your petitions (or statistical summary including number of signatures on each petition) to Judy L. if you haven't done so (get address from your Diocesan President)

The following gives an overview of our process since the beginning. All new MLAs now will have set up their offices, caught their breath and be ready to listen. As you meet with them, please share with them some of the background. **Please let them know this is not a formal petition and cannot be tabled in the legislature but it is something that their constituents want to have happen.** It is hoped they will do their own homework and then bring it forward to the Legislature themselves.

Background Information
Petition: Urge the Alberta Provincial Government
to amend the Alberta Health Act to ensure that
the Seniors' Advocate is an Officer of the Legislature
and therefore independent

We the undersigned are concerned citizens who urge our leaders
to act on this issue and
"Give Seniors A Voice"

➤ **Reasons for the Petition**

In the Fall of 2013 Wildrose MLA Kerry Towles proposed Bill 208 to create the Seniors' Advocate as an independent officer of the Legislature. The Advocate would report directly to the Legislature and be given the power to investigate complaints launched by seniors and have the ability to perform system-wide audits to explore better ways to deliver care. That would have created a Seniors' Advocate as an officer of the Legislature, independent from government, who would then represent the interests of seniors.

In December 2013 the Alberta's then-PC government announced the first **Health Advocate** who was to set up the Health Care Advocate's office whose mandate would be to help Albertans navigate the health care system. This office included the Health Care Advocate, a Seniors Advocate and a Mental Health Patient Advocate and this office was to be accountable to the Minister of Health.

The government's announcement did not create an independent seniors' advocate reporting directly to the Legislature, rather it kept the advocate in the Health Ministry. Having an independent ...??

The government in the past created an independent advocate for Child and Youth Services when it was clear that maintaining the position within the health ministry was ineffective. As service to seniors continues to grow, its position in the health ministry will be ineffective.

The critical value of an independent seniors' advocate is explicitly stated within public Interest Alberta's Task Force on Seniors and the Parkland Institute's report, *From Bad to Worse: Residential Elder Care in Alberta*.

- "Alberta's population, like the rest of Canada's, is aging. As of March 2011, there were about 410,000 seniors in Alberta but by 2031, when the last of the baby boomers reach 65 years of age, it is projected that there will be more than 923,000 seniors - meaning about one in five Albertans will be a senior."
<<http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/seniors/aging-population.html>>
- The issues of seniors will continue will to grow and they will need an independent voice free from political interference with the ability to identify systemic issues and areas of care where vulnerable seniors are at risk and to hold the government responsible for the services it provides.

- After much examination and review of the mandate of the new seniors ministry, it was concluded that the need for an independent advocate is even greater as seniors now have to navigate through two ministries – Health and Seniors – to help with their concerns.
- The following **excerpts** are taken from Jeff Johnson, Minister of Seniors, in a letter dated Jan. 21, 2015 to Mary Martin, a member of the subcommittee of the provincial initiative:

“I also understand that you are interested in discussing the role of the Seniors’ Advocate. The office officially opened on April 1, 2014. The seniors’ Advocate reports to myself but currently operates as part of the Office of the Alberta Health Advocates. The Seniors’ Advocate is appointed by Ministerial Order under the *Public Service Act* and the *Government Organization Act* and identifies that the Advocate is responsible for: supporting seniors and their caregivers by referring concerns and complaints to the appropriate existing channels; providing information on the rights, interests and needs of seniors, as well as government funded seniors’ programs and services; engaging seniors and stakeholders regarding issues affecting seniors; and providing advice to the Minister of Seniors regarding systemic issues being faced by seniors, their families and their caregivers...

“In addition to setting out the responsibilities listed above, the Ministerial Order gives the Advocate specific authority to request inspections of supportive living facilities, long term care accommodations, auxiliary hospitals and nursing homes.

“While the Seniors’ Advocate have various responsibilities, the vast majority of inquiries received in the first six months were related to seniors seeking assistance with navigating government programs and services.

“Should you have concerns regarding seniors in the continuing care system, these issues can be pursued with the Minister of Health. You can e-mail the Health Minister directly at health.minister@gov.ab.ca with your concerns.”

- In light of the above excerpts there does not appear to be a vehicle for accountability for recommendations being made by the Seniors’ Advocate.
- As of the election we have a Premier who deems seniors’ issues important and has established a Seniors’ Ministry but that ministry has been expendable in the past. In 2012 it had been a separate government department when Whitecourt-St. Anne MLA George VanderBerg was the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. It was moved under the Health Care Minister in Dec. 2013.
- The needs of seniors should not be at the whim of the politicians but should be an office (Seniors' Advocate Office) independent of political interference similar to the Child and Advocate Youth.
- **This is not a formal petition and there is no expectation it will be tabled in the Legislature. We want to inform our individual MLAs of the wishes of their constituents. We hope the MLAs themselves will bring the issue forward.**