Dear Hon. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *{Insert the name of your local MP, whose name and address can be found here: http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members}*

I am a constituent in your riding of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I am thankful for the time you devote to serving our community. Thank you for the dedication you give to representing Canadians.

I want to begin this letter by clearly stating that I support the convictions contained in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I am thankful our government seeks to protect the rights of all people and I celebrate living in a country that promotes a democracy where all people’s voices and beliefs are encouraged to be heard and respected.

However, I am extremely concerned about the change to the Canada Summer Jobs grant program. In order to be eligible for funding employers will now have to attest that their organization’s core mandate respects and is not counter to certain beliefs. This attestation goes further than the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and details specific beliefs the organization must have that align with the government’s values about reproductive rights, abortion, sexual identity and gender identity. As well, under the terms of the grant, it appears that churches or other faith-based organizations may not be able to hire only those students who share similar faith and values as held by the organization.

Although the guidelines indicate that religious organizations can still apply, it also appears clear that such organizations will not be eligible to receive a grant if they cannot in good conscience sign the statement in the application. This policy change will have a negative impact on many faith-based organizations and their ability to provide needed and helpful services in our community. As it stands, I could not sign the attestation. Therefore this year, {for the first time in \_\_\_ years}…(I did not apply for a Canada Summer Jobs grant / I applied for a Canada Summer Jobs grant via the paper application in order to voice my concerns regarding the attestation.)

I belong to a family of 450 churches (with some 50,000 people) and 14 camps, called the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada (CBAC). Many of these CBAC churches, camps and programs have been able, through access to these grants, to do significant work in our communities for people regardless of their belief system. CBAC organizations seek the betterment of people’s lives and communities through caring for the poor, providing for the marginalized, welcoming refugees, supporting single parents, supplying children and youth programs, creating leadership development opportunities, and so much more. This change to the Canada Summer Jobs Grant Program is concerning as not only will it adversely affect the family of churches to which I belong, but it could affect many other churches, faith-based camps, and community programs provided by people of many different faith-based organizations.

I am also concerned because of what this means for Canadians’ “freedom of conscience and religion” and “freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression” which are also included in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This new policy seems to violate these freedoms. I believe I can still respect others and their rights, even while maintaining the right to disagree on matters of faith and conscience. Such disagreement should not exclude faith-based organizations from being considered a valued and valid part of Canadian society in light of the benefits we provide to Canadian communities and to Canadian society at large; nor should such disagreement automatically preclude us from full consideration by the Canada Summer Jobs program.

I, and those of my community, understand, affirm and support our government’s desire to not fund hateful or harmful agendas or organizations. I believe this attestation goes not only further than that, but also beyond the bounds of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as it requires an expression of affirmation of specific beliefs about abortion, same-sex marriage, and gender identity that many in our community would not hold. We believe the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides for free, respectful and civil dialogue on such matters; and does not impose agreement to the specifics required on the attestation that is this year a requirement on the Canada Summer Grants application.

Please be an advocate for our community and for our fundamental freedoms. Ask your government to revoke this attestation immediately.

Please keep me informed on the efforts you are making to change this policy.

Sincerely,

*{Name and address}*