



An open letter to Minister Bill Blair

April 20, 2020

Hon. Bill Blair
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Sent via e-mail to bill.blair@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Blair,

On behalf of Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns (CDPG), PolySeSouvient, the Coalition for Gun Control, and Danforth Families for Safe Communities, we are writing to you in deep sorrow. Like all Canadians, we grieve with the families and communities affected by the mass shooting in Nova Scotia on the weekend.

With health workers, policy makers, and all Canadians focused on the COVID-19 crisis and efforts to keep patients, communities, and families safe, it is indeed tragically unfortunate that attention must be briefly directed to another issue, but the consequences of gun violence are not constrained by a virus: firearms remain a serious public health concern, even during a pandemic.

This devastating tragedy has supplanted the original intent of our letter, which was to express our alarm over continuing media reports of an “explosion” in sales of ammunition and guns – including military style assault weapons.

As you are aware, measures to contain the virus – necessary as they are – are increasing the vulnerability of women and children in abusive environments. As has been noted by mental health experts, there is also a heightened risk of anxiety and depression during this time of health and economic uncertainty and physical distancing. The scientific evidence demonstrates very clearly the links between access to firearms and the risk of femicide, suicide, and accidental shootings.

Further, the pandemic and associated misinformation campaigns have led police and anti-hate experts to warn of a risk of violence from far-right groups. The propensity for such groups and individuals to stockpile guns, particularly military-style assault weapons, has been noted in Canada.

On both sides of the border, gun lobbies and their supporters have for years deployed a rhetoric of fear and isolationism that equates guns with freedom and personal protection. This creates a potentially dangerous environment during a pandemic. As medical experts can attest, a gun cannot protect you from a virus.

Minister, our organizations’ shared position on gun control is well known. We understand that prior to the pandemic your government had been preparing to act on election promises to restrict access to firearms. While we appreciate the capacity for substantive policy change is difficult at this moment –

and acknowledge your government's efforts to respond to the gravity of the COVID-19 crisis and resulting consequences – we implore you to take one decisive, achievable action right now: ban the new sale of military style assault weapons. As has been well documented, these guns pose an excessive risk to public safety and serve no reasonable purpose.

As this pandemic has taught us, preventative measures to protect public health and safety work, and Canadians have coalesced around the importance of scientific evidence. You have the power take an evidence-based measure right now that will save lives. Sadly, we cannot reverse past tragedies, nor prevent all future tragedies, but we can do much more to reduce the risk.

Today, we ask you to take one small step toward this goal. Please act now Minister Blair.

For more information or to arrange a meeting, please contact Christopher Holcroft, Consultant for Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns, at christopherholcroft@hotmail.ca.

Sincerely,

Dr. Najma Ahmed, **Canadian Doctors for Protection from Guns**

Heidi Rathjen, **PolySeSouvient**

Wendy Cukier, **Coalition for Gun Control**

Ken Price and Claire Smith, **Danforth Families for Safe Communities**

Jonathan Landry-Leclerc, **PAS_ICI / NOT_HERE - Student Coalition for Tougher Gun Control Laws**

On behalf of our organizations