

Open letter to Bill Blair, Federal Minister of Public Safety, and Marco Mendicino, Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and Patty Hajdu, federal Minister of Health in support of #HungerStrikeLaval,

Indigiqueer and trans writers, makers, community organizers, service providers, and activists are voicing our support for the migrants in detention who are currently on hunger strike in the Laval Immigration Detention Centre in face of risks of COVID19 virus, and to support their demand for the immediate release of all migrant detainees as part of measures related to public health. Human rights and medical organizations have noted that social distancing is not possible for incarcerated populations, including detainees, and that during the COVID19 pandemic, detention poses a catastrophic risk to the health of these populations. It is unconscionable that detainees - many of whom have pre-existing health conditions - have now been on hunger strike for 7 days in order to access the basic protections being recommended to the general public.

The Canadian government so far has failed to take action to prevent the health catastrophe that #COVID19 poses for prisoners held at the Laval Immigration Holding Centre and in other prisons and detention centres. We support the immediate release of all detainees, and their safe and appropriate housing, in the name of public health.

[The UN High Commissioner of Human Rights](#) has stated that incarceration is an amplifier of infection and embodying a possibly disastrous spread of the COVID-19 virus.

From their website: “The consequences of neglecting [people in detention] are potentially catastrophic,” the High Commissioner said. Governments must work quickly to reduce the number of people in detention, she said, noting that several countries have already taken positive actions.

Samer Muscati from [Human Rights Watch](#) has written that that “Canada’s Immigration Detainees At Higher Risk In Pandemic”, stating that “These detainees face significant risks to their physical and mental health if there’s an outbreak of COVID-19 in immigration holding centres and maximum-security provincial jails across the country.”

“A correctional officer at Toronto South Detention Centre (TSDC) in Etobicoke has tested positive for COVID-19 and now someone incarcerated (who remains in incarceration) at the same detention centre has tested positive:

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-inmate-tests-positive-for-covid-19-1.4868092> .

According to Globe and Mail reporting, Ontario plans to release certain inmates nearing the end of their sentences to curb the risk of spread.

CBC recently announced that “Nova Scotia is granting temporary release to some inmates during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate the virus's spread within jails. The province announced Wednesday it would grant temporary absences, with no fixed end date, to 41 people serving intermittent sentences.”

We are asking that Indigenous community members be in solidarity with #HungerStikeLaval and voice their dissent to the following contacts:

Federal Minister of Public Safety Bill Blair: Bill.Blair@parl.gc.ca

Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendocino:

Minister@cic.gc.ca

Federal Minister of Health, Patty Hajdu: Patty.Hajdu@parl.gc.ca

For background on the hunger strike, you can also visit the [website](#) of Solidarity Across Borders, to see the detainees past and present actions, including the petition for release signed by 34 detainees over a week ago, and daily updates from the detention centre. Here is a video of the [press conference](#), held Saturday, March 28th, which featured the voice of one of the hunger strikers, a Senegalese asylum-seeker who crossed the border from the US into Canada, and medical and legal experts in support of those on hunger strike.

Signed,

Lindsay Nixon
jaye simpson
Arielle Twist
Fallon Simard
Whess Harman
Emily Riddle
Billy-Ray Belcourt
Justin Ducharme
Molly Swain (in solidarity)
Lou Cornum
Lacie Burning