

From: KATHLEEN FINLAY KATHLEEN@ZeroHarmNow.com
Subject: URGENT INTERVENTION REQUIRED RE MARCH GIS PAYMENTS
Date: March 16, 2022 at 11:12 AM
To: Omidvar, Ratna Ratna.Omidvar@sen.parl.gc.ca, Patricia.Bovey@sen.parl.gc.ca
Cc: kamal.khera@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca, alexis.conrad@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca, annette.gibbons@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca, cliff.groen@servicecanada.gc.ca, lori.k.macdonald@servicecanada.gc.ca

KF

Hon. Ratna Omidvar, Chair
Hon. Patricia Bovey, Deputy Chair
Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Dear Senators:

I am writing to draw your attention to a serious issue that will prevent the neediest of seniors from receiving reimbursement of their clawed-back GIS benefits in March. As you will recall, the Minister of Seniors promised your committee, during its consideration of Bill C-12, that seniors in the most dire financial situation would receive the full reimbursement of their yearly GIS entitlement in March. I raised my concerns about the likelihood of confusion on this point, given the vague statements made by the Minister, [in my written submission](#) on the bill. As it turns out, the situation is much worse than I feared.

In my submission, dated and received February 28, 2022, I alerted the committee to the following:

“However, even at this late date, confusion persists as to how the most vulnerable of seniors who have suffered the greatest financial loss will be able to receive the lump sum payment, which the Minister has promised will be sent out in March. What are the criteria for determining who receives the earliest tranche of compensation? Do seniors need to apply? Is it an automatic process? The Committee should insist upon clarification so that affected seniors will know precisely what steps, if any, they need to take.”

I am now told by seniors who have recently contacted Service Canada to find out when they would receive the payment in March that their payment will be delayed another month (the date still not specified) if they did not contact the agency prior to February 28th. Bill C-12, as you know, was still before the committee on February 28th and was not even passed by the Senate until March 3rd. The committee had an opportunity to seek clarification on the issue I raised, but apparently chose not to do so.

As I understand it, there was no written policy guidance on who would receive the March payment and what, if anything, eligible seniors needed to do to ensure they received the payment. The direction to contact Service Canada by February 28th was not made public. All of this information seems to have been passed on by word of mouth. Even for those who had contacted Service Canada months before the bill was passed to establish and document their

contacted Service Canada months before the bill was passed to establish and document their case of financial hardship – and the government has a record of these contacts – it was not enough to trigger the March payment, according to Service Canada. While they are telling callers that they were required to contact Service Canada before February 28th, the agency will not, or cannot, say when this requirement came into force. Needless to say, there is no information on Service Canada's website about the March payment.

As I pointed out in my submission to the committee and have repeatedly raised in numerous op-eds and news interviews over the past two years, for those who have no phone or whose service has been cut because of an inability to pay the bill (which is the case for hundreds of seniors whose GIS benefits were eliminated or reduced), it is impossible to contact Service Canada by phone. This reality, too, has escaped the gaze of this government.

This is an absolutely appalling assault on anything remotely resembling acceptable public policy and a further betrayal of a vulnerable population who desperately need these long-withheld funds to survive.

In my submission, I advised the committee of cases I had become aware of where GIS clawbacks led to death and suicide. The withholding of GIS benefits has been nothing short of a massive train wreck of physical and emotional harm to the very people who can least afford it. That injury will be added to immeasurably for those living in penury who have been counting on the March payment. To these seniors, one more month of waiting will be like an eternity, and I desperately fear some will not make it.

While it is difficult to imagine how this matter could be more serious than it is, Minister Khera and her staff have repeatedly ignored my outreach for clarification and my numerous requests for action to set things right. There was no indication whatever on the Minister's official social media accounts, or anywhere else, regarding the steps seniors had to take to obtain the earlier March payment.

I am now turning to your office for urgent intervention to ensure there is no further delay in providing the March payment to all those in greatest need.

I am available to provide any additional clarification should that be helpful.

Respectfully,

Kathleen Finlay

KATHLEEN FINLAY

KATHLEEN FINLAY

Founder

[ZeroHarmNow](#) Advisors

Making compassion the new normal

