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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **CANADIAN CIVIL LIBERTIES ASSOCIATION REPORTS TARGETED AND HEIGHTENED HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC ABUSE DURING PANDEMIC**

TORONTO, May 7, 2020 – The Canadian Civil Liberties Association and The 519 wrote to the Prime Minister, seeking solutions to the alarming increase of LGBTQ2S abuse, particularly in urban communities across Canada.

“CCLA stands with queer and trans communities and organizations facing discrimination and a disproportionate amount of COVID related public anxiety and bigotry. Unfortunately, some bylaw officers and police are currently part of the problem, rather than being a major part of the solution to homophobic and transphobic threats and abuse,” said Michael Bryant, Executive Director of CCLA, a national civil liberties watchdog.

Increased public anxiety coupled with discrimination has meant that queer, trans and non-binary communities are exponentially more vulnerable today. They’re facing increased experiences of homophobia and transphobia within their own protected spaces and neighbourhoods, Bryant argued, especially on the streets of high density urban centres.

Justin Khan the Director of Public Interest and Legal Initiatives at The 519 stated that “despite the current flattening of the COVID-19 curve, increased homophobic and transphobic attitudes and behaviours continue to rise in our local neighbourhoods. Community members have expressed fear and increased vulnerability to our frontline workers when accessing The 519 and its services. Increased stigmatization and discrimination, along with both verbal and physical violence, is affecting the livelihood of LGBTQ2S people in what is known as our ‘safe’ spaces.”

CCLA reported that there are increased accounts of:

- Street checks, or carding, where racialized minorities, homeless and underhoused individuals are stopped by police or bylaw officers, seeking identification and asking other questions, without cause. This is particularly threatening for racialized queer and trans individuals who are often disproportionately stopped and questioned by law enforcement.
- Increased enforcement of vague and unclear emergency management orders that create new offences chargeable under provincial offences legislation. LGBTQ2S communities have disproportionately high levels of homelessness housing precarity making them more susceptible to being unduly targeted and charged with these vague offences.
- Increased verbal and physical incidents directed toward vulnerable communities, with unfounded arguments that further conflate stigma in relation to HIV/AIDs, COVID-19, and lead to increased acceptance of homophobic and transphobic behaviours.

- Increased fear of assault, bullying, harassment and discrimination against queer Canadians, arising from the combination of heightened public anxiety, xenophobia, and heightened anti-queer rhetoric.

The two organizations are seeking aid from the PM to work with provincial-territorial-municipal authorities to:

- Collect and report on public health data, including deaths and violence, for vulnerable populations inevitably untouched by official census or other standard population measures;
- Record and disclose all data, to increase transparency and accountability of enforcement authorities of all jurisdictions (FPT and municipal police, plus municipal bylaw enforcement), with respect to:
  - all data recording interactions between people in enforcement, and the LGBTQ2S community, where available;
  - all data recording interactions with the public generally, including positive and negative interactions, warnings, and charges/tickets laid against people, with a breakdown of socioeconomic categories for the defendants, where possible;
  - training, policies and practices seeking to aid LGBTQ2S persons amid COVID homophobia/transphobia.
  - any variables such as 311/COVID snitch line impact on activity by enforcement officials;
  - analysis of 311/COVID snitch lines as to aggregate categories of complaints, and how frequently they include homophobia/transphobia and bigotry;
- Report to the public on lessons learned from the latter disclosures, and recommendations for reform;
- Immediate development of policies and practices that incorporate the intersectionality of queer and trans experiences with trauma informed practices to be used by all law enforcement agencies, regarding the treatment of LGBTQ2S communities.

The [Canadian Civil Liberties Association](#) is a non-government, independent association and charity. We stand up to power, defend human rights, and engage in public education across Canada. Our work is done in courts, classrooms and legislatures. CCLA has fought for freedom from abuse of power by authorities in Canada's highest courts on hundreds of cases since 1964. [media@ccla.org](mailto:media@ccla.org)

Located in downtown Toronto, [The 519](#) is a City of Toronto agency, a registered charity, and Canada's prominent LGBTQ2S Community Centre. The 519 strives to make a real difference in people's lives, while contributing to the advancement of LGBTQ2S rights and inclusion in Toronto and beyond. We take pride in being an organization that responds to the critical and emerging needs of our communities by delivering essential services for the most vulnerable and marginalized, and leading advocacy, anti-violence, and access to justice initiatives. The 519 has been a valuable and vibrant community hub offering service, space, and leadership for LGBTQ2S communities and the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood since 1975. [Media@The519.org](mailto:Media@The519.org)