

To: The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos  
Minister of Health  
hcminister.ministresc@hc-sc.gc.ca

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett  
Minister of Mental Health and Addictions  
mhaminister.ministresmd@hc-sc.gc.ca

cc: Dr. Stephen Lucas  
Deputy Minister of Health Canada  
Stephen.lucas@hc-sc.gc.ca

Jennifer Saxe  
Director General Health Canada,  
Controlled Substances and Cannabis Branch  
Jennifer.saxe@Canada.ca

Health Canada  
Substance Use and Addictions  
Program  
hc.suap-puds.sc@canada.ca

Dr. Theresa Tam  
Chief Public Health Officer,  
Public Health Agency of Canada phac.cpho-  
acsp.aspc@canada.ca

**Re: URGENT REQUEST: Section 56(I) exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to ensure equitable public health protections for vulnerable Canadians.**

November 2, 2021

Dear Ministers Duclos and Bennett,

Congratulations on your recent appointments as Ministers of Health and Mental Health and Addictions. We look forward to working together to end the unacceptably high rate of overdose deaths in this country.

We write on behalf of the Drug User Liberation Front (DULF) and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU): drug user-led groups based in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver whose mandates include improving the lives of people who use drugs and providing tangible solutions to the ongoing drug toxicity crisis. Today, we are following up on our correspondence of August 31, 2021, wherein we requested an exemption under section 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) to operate the "DULF Compassion Club." The DULF Compassion Club is an innovative project that aims to reduce overdose-related deaths by introducing regulation into the illicit drug market and providing a consistent supply of substances that are labeled with the contents and potency. As laid out in our proposal, we believe this model will not only save lives, but also reduce the incidence of crime and reduce the existing burden on the judicial and medical systems.

Please note that while awaiting the Minister's response to this request, DULF and VANDU submitted a complementary Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) application for funding to operate our innovative safe supply proposal. We ask that you consider this application (attached to the enclosing email and including several letters of support), alongside

our exemption request. Please also note that we issued a follow-up letter to your department on October 15, 2021 but have received no response to date.

For context, both of these applications were accompanied with expressions of support from a broad range of stakeholders including drug user groups, Vancouver Coastal Health, First Nations Health Authority, the City of Vancouver, Portland Hotel Society, The BC Centre on Substance Use and many more prominent organizations in the fields of drug policy and substance use.

Given the recent shuffling of Cabinet, we would like to reiterate: this is an *extremely* urgent request to respond to an ongoing and worsening public health emergency in British Columbia and across Canada. A grim reminder of this is the recent BC Coroners Service announcement that July 2021 was the second worst month ever for overdose deaths in BC, with 184 suspected overdose deaths. What's more, our province is on track to experience the deadliest year yet.

While we understand that the election and cabinet shuffle may have caused some inconveniences, the urgency of our situation still stands, and we would request a response as soon as possible. Your new positions hold tremendous potential to change the *status quo*; granting this exemption would be a clear indicator that your departments care about the lives and futures of people who use drugs, and that you honour their *Charter* rights to life, liberty, security, and equality. At this point, even a temporary exemption while the proposals are being considered would be acceptable.

Regards,



Jeremy Kalicum  
Co-founder, Drug User Liberation Front



Eris Nyx  
Co-founder, Drug User Liberation Front



Brittany Graham  
Executive Director, Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users