

Monsef to lay groundwork for national child care system^[1]

Canada Post rural services, rural broadband coverage, settling immigrants in rural areas, National Housing Strategy among cabinet tasks for Peterborough-Kawartha MP.

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Maryam Monsef stated Friday that she will "lay the groundwork for a pan-Canadian child care system" as one of her projects over this term in office as women and gender equality and rural economic development minister.

Monsef and all her fellow cabinet ministers received mandate letters from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday.

One of the tasks in Monsef's letter is to help set up a secretariat to develop a national daycare system.

In 2020 the federal government plans to open 40,000 new daycare spaces and 250,000 after-school program spaces across Canada, Monsef wrote in a statement Friday.

The plan comes just as city council is about to debate closing its two municipally run daycare centres (Pearson and Peterborough Day Care) as well as two after-schools programs (at Edmison Heights and Westmount Public Schools) in response to declining child care funding from the provincial government.

City council's debate on the closures is expected in January; if council decides to discontinue the programs, closures will occur in June.

Other tasks in Monsef's mandate letter include:

- Ensuring that more women and girls can access housing through the National Housing Strategy.
- Increasing high-speed broadband coverage in rural Canada.
- Helping improve Canada Post services in rural and remote areas.
- Helping to develop pilot programming to encourage newcomers to Canada to settle in rural areas.

Monsef notes in her statement that she already "built" a full department for Women and Gender Equality and that she will continue "to lead its growth."

She also states that she remains committed to working with local people such as developers and landowners to build more affordable housing for Peterborough.

"Our community can be a model for others in Canada," she wrote.

For example, Monsef cited projects such as construction of the Brock Mission shelter for homeless men as a local collaboration that is working well.

In that project, the city and Brock Mission worked together and received federal funding of more than \$5.2 million from the federal government. The shelter is under construction now on Murray Street.

During the election campaign in the fall, Monsef said the \$55-billion National Housing Strategy has funding available for private companies to build 2,000 affordable apartments in Peterborough over the next two years.

Monsef also stated Friday that she and her cabinet colleagues have been mandated to work together toward fulfilling some of the commitments she made — and her government made — during the election campaign.

For example, high-frequency passenger rail service between Toronto and Quebec City — with a stop in Peterborough — is a priority in the mandate letter of Transport Minister Marc Garneau.

That's a project proposed by Via Rail that Monsef has been championing.

Monsef also notes that Environment and Climate Change Minister Jonathan Wilkinson has been mandated to work toward Canada achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

At climate-change protests and election debates this fall, Monsef was frequently asked by citizens about the Liberals' plan to curb carbon emissions in Canada.

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