

## **Renew PEI: Economic Recovery and Growth Submission**

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We have a unique opportunity to create a PEI that works for everyone. Since March, one constant thing that I have been hearing is an apprehension, a fear of returning to normal. Gaps have been highlighted like never before. We must find long term, sustainable solutions to these inequities, to do otherwise is irresponsible. As MLA for Charlottetown-Victoria Park, I have been hearing from constituents and stakeholders on an ongoing basis. Since I am the critic for Education and Lifelong Learning as well as the Status of Women, my lens is inevitably focused on issues surrounding these files.

Equity and accessibility are two pillars on which we need the rebuilding of our economy to start. Economic growth is nothing unless people are healthy and safe as well. We must understand fully what this means as we implement any and all new changes and policies.

We must truly understand what it means to apply different lenses when considering the unintended consequences of a policy. These lenses include:

- A gender based analysis plus framework lens
- A diversity and inclusion lens
- An accessibility lens
- A child and youth lens
- An environmental lens

Reconciliation, systemic racism and systemic oppression go hand in hand with the public health issues related to COVID-19. These deep rooted issues are a direct result of policies that were poorly thought-out without the use of the above mentioned lenses. If we are to move forward in a truly healthy way, we must conduct reviews of all policies. It has never been more important to take a step back and consider the new economy that we want to create. It is crucial that we support the incredible work and value of our community organizations without which we would be hard pressed to fill the gaps. We must consider an economy that takes into account our limited resources and the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

We must also ensure that all programs, services and policies are well consulted on, thought-out and planned prior to being announced and implemented.

## **Family/Domestic Violence**

I have attended countless forums and have had many discussions on putting a stop to the violence that so many women and children face. We must support women and meet them where they are by understanding the barriers and challenges they face. Dawn Wilson had 3 calls to action for the government when she addressed the crowd at the memorial service of the Montreal massacre on December 19, 2019.

- 1) Livable wages, a Universal Basic Income and emergency financial supports as needed
- 2) Safe, affordable, accessible housing options
- 3) Access to affordable, Island wide public transportation

We must understand the dynamics of abusive relationships. As we do the work to support women, we must not forget the children. Children are revictimized every time their mother returns to the abusive environment. In some cases, their mothers are killed. We must strive to better understand the effects of trauma and work with children. Children are hiding in their bedrooms and this has an effect on their relationships with their moms. We must work to support this family dynamic.

There is endless value in teaching children and youth about sexual health and healthy relationships and everything that this encompasses. We must ensure that our education system does a good job at delivering this.

It is also crucial to support men. In a recent Aboriginal Business Women's Association forum, they spoke about the importance of providing men with experiential opportunities to learn the coping skills required to deal with emotions and to regulate in healthy ways. A key component to this with Indigenous men is embedded in traditional culture, tradition, spirituality and connection to land.

## Education

We must understand the value of education as we consider the economy. While curriculum is not driven by government, we must conduct a review of curriculum. We must consider the bigger picture and understand the full value of subjects such as sexual health, healthy relationships, history and diversity. We must not underestimate the value of art, music, time in nature and movement.

We must understand literacy as a social determinant of health. As we consider the low levels of literacy we have in this province, we must support community organizations and government departments who are delivering literacy programming to people of all ages.

We must understand the levels of trauma students in the education system are carrying with them as they walk the hallways of our Island schools.. As we consider effects of the pandemic and the high levels of child abuse in this province, early intervention and prevention, mental health and other social supports are crucial in our schools. It is an educator's job to educate. It is not an educator's job to fix the trauma and social problems in the school. If we do not address these issues we are not following our own educational philosophies of giving students a place to reach their full potential. A school cannot possibly do this on it's own.

During the pandemic it was made evident that for many of our students, school is crucial to both their health and safety. It is time to take a better look at how we can make schools a point of

entry into various systems. If there are social supports required by a student there should be a mechanism in place that allows for the flow of communication and services into schools.

We must review our career curriculums. Introducing Island students to various career possibilities and facilitating hands-on experience is crucial to sparking an interest. Work in the trades, for example, is a field where many students could benefit from more knowledge and experience. Our outdated Industrial Revolution-style of education is leaving many of our students behind. We must ensure we provide time and opportunity for intrinsic motivation to allow students to learn more about themselves and what motivates them. One of the ways we can do that is by allowing students to explore the trades as an educational option in our public schools system.

We must find ways to support post-secondary institutions and students better, including rent supplements, tuition supports, student loan supports and food. We must also look at the student loan process and remove the significance of parental income. We must check on our students and see what their needs are and implement the supports accordingly.

## Childcare/Early Childhood

We must increase the number of licensed daycares, increase pay rates for Early Childhood Education workers and substantially increase investment into Early Childhood Education in order to increase the number of spaces available across the province at affordable rates and extended hours. This helps remove barriers that prevent women from participating in the workforce and, in turn, will contribute to greater economic growth.

## Women's Equity

We must acknowledge the inequity that women have experienced through this pandemic. We must understand and value the monstrous amounts of unpaid work that women take on. When women are working, the economy and GDP improve and we must acknowledge that, ensuring we are using a gender-based analysis plus lens on all policies in all departments. Women must be at the table contributing to the decision making process with no exception. We must legislate changes needed as they will not happen organically. We must look at women-dominated industries and ensure equity and representation.

## Housing

We must ensure affordable housing developments are a priority so all Islanders have a safe, financially sustainable and secure place to live and be a part of the workforce regardless of the changes happening in the economy. A rental registry should be a priority. We should be considering community living structures and supporting initiatives such as Housing First (CMHA). These programs and types of housing support people so that they may live independently, healthily and with dignity.

## Social Services/UBI

We must ensure consistency between case workers in various departments. Continuity of care is crucial between services and programs so that clients are not reliving their trauma every time they have to share it with a different service provider. We must ensure that our files and records are being used in the ways in which they were intended and evaluate the effectiveness of these practices. We must review and simplify social assistance and disability support programs taking into consideration the recommendations of the Special Committee on Poverty.

## Health, Mental Health and Addictions

We must recognize the importance of the social determinants of health, healthy childhoods and how this translates into healthy adulthood as well as to a healthy society. We must do better at early intervention and prevention. Programs such as Best Start, public health supports and community organizations are doing their absolute best to support this. Programs that were disappointingly prematurely announced such as 1000 First Days and midwifery must be implemented immediately. We must ensure that we are recruiting professionals and ensuring a quality of life for them to help prevent burnout.

## Support Local Business

We must do better at supporting local business and doing all we can to keep doors open and encourage innovation. Finding creative ways to support local businesses in this new economic climate is a crucial step moving forward. While COVID-19 is temporary, some of these changes are not. We must engage with local business owners and entrepreneurs to see how we can best do this. One example is allowing craft breweries to continue Island-wide deliveries.

As we consider what tourism will look like in the future, we must support local musicians and artists as they are a crucial part of our culture.

We must consider local procurement and look at ways that we can reduce our ecological footprint and support our own local producers, manufacturers, farmers, etc.

As we grow, it is easy to default and fall into the status quo. If we are to learn from COVID-19, a return to status quo will not work. The pandemic has highlighted all of these things and more.

*“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”*

-Maya Angelou