

INDEPENDENT SENIORS ADVOCATE INITIATIVE BACKGROUND JANUARY 2022

“Urge the Alberta Provincial Government to amend the Alberta Health Act to ensure that the Seniors’ Advocate is an Officer of the Legislature and therefore Independent”

In 2013, the idea of having a Seniors’ Advocate to address seniors’ issues arose out of the news that New Brunswick created a Seniors’ Advocate position.

Within Alberta, Kerry Towle, a member of the Wild Rose party presented a private members bill, Bill C 208, titled the “Seniors’ Advocate Act” in the Fall of 2013. Unfortunately, the Bill died in the Legislature in December of 2013.

In January 2014, the Alberta Government formed the Health Care Advocate Office which included a Health Care Advocate, a Mental Health Care Advocate and a Seniors’ Advocate. All of these offices reported to the Minister of Health. This did not meet the criteria of our initiative: the CWL was specifically asking for an Independent Officer of the Legislature. This would mean that the Seniors’ Advocate would report to the Legislature and not to a Minister of the Legislature. The office, being independent, would survive a change in government and could continue with its mandate to serve the seniors in Alberta.

In September of 2014, Jim Prentice became the new Premier with the Conservative Party and formed the Ministry of Seniors with Jeff Johnson as the Minister. The CWL put its petition on hold while it awaited the guidelines of this new ministry. Since the guidelines did not include independent accountability, the petition was circulated in all constituencies that had CWL councils. Over 4000 signatures were collected, and were sent to the ABMK CWL Provincial Council.

In 2015, a provincial election was called and the NDP under Rachel Notley formed the new Alberta government.

April 2016 saw the ABMK CWL President and some standing committee chairs meet with the NDP Minister of Seniors and Housing, Lori Sigurdson. She did appoint a seniors’ advocate, but the position was again not independent of the government.

In October 2018 the NDP was defeated by the UCP government, the UPC eliminated the seniors’ advocate position.

In 2020, the ABMK Provincial Council met with the UPC regarding the Senior’s Advocate. While they did listen to us, no change was made to the existing ministries. Letters continue to be written with no indication of reversing their decision.

Action Plan

Keeping in mind our core values of faith, service and social justice, we are encouraging every member of the Alberta Mackenzie Provincial council to contact their local MLA by writing a letter outlining the need for a seniors’ advocate, including having the seniors’ advocate be an independent officer of the legislature. All Alberta political parties need to be aware of our concerns.

A sample letter will be provided to assist in your letter writing. Please add your own comments or feel free to write your own letter. We are hoping to meet with the Alberta government in the near future, so we ask that you send your letters to your MLA no later than February 28th.