

DEFEND REFUGEES

DEFEND REFUGEES: *An Open Letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney*

The Right Honourable Mark Carney, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Carney,

This letter comes from Defend Refugees, a coalition of queer and trans refugees, advocates, frontline organizations, and community partners convened by The 519 and Rainbow Railroad.

At Davos, you spoke about a world in rupture. You said that Canada must stop pretending, name reality, build strength at home, and act with both principle and pragmatism.

As queer and trans refugees, advocates, and allies, we agree. So let us name the reality facing our community right now.

Around the world, over 60 countries still criminalize consensual same-sex intimacy, and many more punish queer and trans people through violence, public humiliation, forced conversion, and social exclusion. This is the global context many of us are fleeing.

We know what it means to flee home because of who we are and who we love.

We know what it means to arrive in Canada hoping to find safety and belonging, only to face another system that is becoming harder to navigate, harder to trust, and harder to survive.

Many of us have survived years of hiding, sexual violence, police brutality, torture, or threats from our own families and communities.

We come to Canada because survival leaves us no choice.

When Canada signed the Refugee Convention, it made a global promise to protect people fleeing persecution. But for queer and trans refugees, that promise is becoming harder to believe when new barriers are added to an asylum system that already asks us to explain persecution that is intimate, traumatic, and often shaped by years of hiding and shame.

The passing of Bill C-12, cuts to refugee healthcare, housing instability, delayed work permits, and rising anti-refugee rhetoric are not just abstract policy issues. They shape whether queer and trans refugees can disclose who we are, access care, avoid exploitation, and rebuild our lives without being forced back into hiding.

DEFEND REFUGEES

When refugee healthcare is cut, post-trauma counselling, HIV care, gender-affirming care, and other forms of critical support are pushed out of reach.

When we are priced out of the housing market, we end up in shelters that are unsafe.

When work permits are delayed, we are pushed into poverty, exploitative work, or dependence on unsafe relationships for housing, food, or protection.

When public leaders treat refugees as a burden, misinformation spreads, fear deepens, and people are dehumanized.

On the frontlines, we are seeing the consequences already. Your government's decisions are pushing us deeper into crisis and leaving frontline services and community organizations to respond to preventable harm.

Prime Minister, you have said that Canada must be principled and pragmatic. These government decisions are neither. They create more crises, more cost, more disorder, and more harm for people Canada has promised to protect.

There is nothing principled about weakening protection for people fleeing anti-queer and anti-trans violence.

There is nothing pragmatic about cutting preventive healthcare and pushing people into overcrowded emergency rooms.

There is nothing efficient about making queer and trans refugees sicker, poorer, more isolated, and less able to rebuild our lives.

There is nothing strong about a country managing political pressure by pushing harm onto people with the least power to absorb it.

When you raised the Pride flag on Parliament Hill, you signaled that Canada's commitment to queer and trans safety is not seasonal. But symbols carry responsibility. A flag raised in June must be matched by decisions that protect queer and trans people, including refugees, when our safety and dignity are under threat.

We urge your government to take three immediate actions:

1. Protect queer and trans refugees in Bill C-12 regulations. Bill C-12 will hit queer and trans refugees differently, because our claims often involve delayed disclosure, persecution that is hidden from public view, and evidence that can be dangerous to gather. Do not let new timelines unfairly deny protection to people fleeing anti-queer and anti-trans persecution.

DEFEND REFUGEES

2. Restore refugee healthcare and reverse IFHP cuts and co-payments that put this care out of reach. Healthcare cuts disproportionately impact queer and trans refugees because we often need trauma counselling, HIV treatment, gender-affirming care, and sexual health support to recover and rebuild.
3. Fund safer shelter and housing access for queer and trans refugees. For queer and trans refugees, safety is not guaranteed in shelters, housing, or other frontline services. In the next federal budget cycle, protect and expand federal housing and shelter funding so municipalities and community organizations can prevent displacement and provide safer options.

Prime Minister, the decisions you make now will demonstrate whether Canada's values can survive contact with political pressure.

We urge your government to meet this moment with courage, clarity, and principled action.

Sincerely,

Defend Refugees