

MEDIA RELEASE

Accessibility concerns must be addressed for Bell Island Ferry

For immediate release

(St. John's, NL—August 22, 2017) The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities – NL has released a position statement in response to increasing public calls for support from concerned and frustrated members of the public around lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities on the ferries serving Bell Island.

Emily Christy, Coalition Executive Director, shares these concerns and seeks the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's response to solving this problem. The Coalition's position follows:

"This lack of accessibility is currently putting residents and visitors with disabilities in a compromised position. Daily, individuals must use the ferries for work, to attend medical appointments in St. John's, and go about their everyday life. Visitors to Bell Island also require accessibility, whether travelling there to visit friends or family or as tourists on holiday. Their health and safety should not be put at risk.

"The Coalition has heard claims of persons with disabilities being injured or having their mobility devices damaged while using the ferry's elevator system, which has a barrier that requires lifting people and their chairs up and over a lip in order to access it. We also have heard complaints that an accessibility ramp is available but not consistently being used to allow people on and off the ferry when it docks. We are very concerned about the safety risks to persons with disabilities and the ordeal they must face, which also threatens their dignity and is against their human rights.

"We have also spoken at length with Mayor Gary Gosine of the Town of Wabana, who we understand has been working tirelessly on this issue. The Coalition is now calling on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to share their stance and plans for rectifying the current situation so that all people can safely use the Bell Island ferry system.

"It is the duty of the provincial government to purchase goods, services and equipment that is usable by all residents of this province. This is public money, which should be spent on items that are usable by everyone. The feedback we have heard about individuals being lifted into the elevator or carried upstairs is unacceptable, against individuals' human rights and shows a disrespect for people's independence and autonomy. The provincial government released an Inclusion Strategy based on dignity, fairness and respect, and for practices to be taking place in this province that go against those pillars means the government is not fulfilling what they have set out to do in terms of inclusion."

The Coalition encourages members of the public to share their concerns and views with the Honourable Lisa Dempster, Minister responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities and the Honourable Steve Crocker, Minister of Transportation and Works. Together we must push for change around the purchasing practices of the provincial government."

To learn more about the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities – NL, visit www.codnl.ca.

CONTACT:

Jennifer Barnable, Research & Communications Coordinator

Coalition of Persons with Disabilities – NL | T: (709) 722-7011 | E: jennifer@codnl.ca