<<INSERT DATE>>

Dear Member of the Legislative Assembly,

I am a Saskatchewan resident who believes that only a secular government will fully respect our diverse population. The government must not give one religion priority over other religions or no religion. There are two issues about which I am writing today:

1. Opening prayer in the legislature.
2. Christmas messages delivered by Premier Brad Wall on behalf of the Saskatchewan Party that identify Christianity as superior to other beliefs and non-belief.

While the majority of Saskatchewan was and may still be Christian, human rights are not matters to be decided by the majority and tradition cannot be used as an excuse to violate human rights. This is an established principle that minorities require protection from the tyranny of the majority. Protection of all people begins with favouring none; therefore, any action by government that excludes a part of the community must be rejected.

Regarding Christian prayer in the legislature, I note that on April 15, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously ruled that the City of Saguenay (QC) must stop reciting a prayer at the start of its Council meetings. In response to the Supreme Court decision, Premier Brad Wall said that the Saskatchewan legislature would continue to hold prayers and that

*I have not had one complaint. Not one concern registered. We’re very fortunate in Saskatchewan to have seen unprecedented population growth and we’re attracting people from all over the world.* (Canadian Press, April 18, 2015)

I am now submitting this complaint and requesting that the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly acknowledge the spirit of this decision and end prayers in the legislature. In case you are not familiar with the decision, key points include that the state has a duty to be neutral on matters of religion and that non-belief is recognized as requiring the same protection as any specific religious belief:

*The state’s duty of religious neutrality results from an evolving interpretation of freedom of conscience and religion. The evolution of Canadian society has given rise to a concept of this neutrality according to which the state must not interfere in religion and beliefs. The state must instead remain neutral in this regard, which means that it must neither favour nor hinder any particular belief, and the same holds true for non-belief. The pursuit of the ideal of a free and democratic society requires the state to encourage everyone to participate freely in public life regardless of their beliefs. A neutral public space free from coercion, pressure and judgment on the part of public authorities in matters of spirituality is intended to protect every person’s freedom and dignity, and it helps preserve and promote the multicultural nature of Canadian society. The state’s duty to protect every person’s freedom of conscience and religion means that it may not use its powers in such a way as to promote the participation of certain believers or non-believers in public life to the detriment of others. If the state adheres to a form of religious expression under the guise of cultural or historical reality or heritage, it breaches its duty of neutrality.* (page 8, Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City), 2015 SCC 16)

The Supreme Court ruling applies across Canada and provides a clear and strong secular direction on the matter of prayers in public spaces.

Regarding Premier Wall's annual Christmas messages, please note that I am not taking issue with the Premier providing year-end reflection and good wishes or even calling this address a “Christmas” message. In these messages, Premier Wall is using his government position to promote his Christian religion as superior to all others or no religion. For example, the 2015 address identifies Jesus as "the divinest heart that ever walked the earth." Government exclusion of minority groups is certainly not the right thing to do and also not aligned with many purported Christian values or the duty of neutrality described above. We need our government to represent the interests of the entire population and to protect the rights of minorities. Premier Wall needs to cease these messages or make any messages religiously neutral.

I respectfully request that you take these matters to the Assembly.

Sincerely,

Address:

Cc (electronic):

Honourable Brad Wall, Premier of Saskatchewan, President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs

Honourable Jim Reiter, Minister of Government Relations, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Telecommunication, Minister Responsible First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs, Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated

Honourable Jeremy Harrison, Minister Responsible for Immigration, Jobs, Skills and Training, Minister Responsible for Trade, Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan, Minister Responsible for Innovation

Honourable Mark Docherty, Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, Minister Responsible for the Provincial Capital Commission

Mr. Cam Broten, Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Victor Lau, Leader of the Green Party of Saskatchewan

Mr. Darrin Lamoureux, Leader of the Saskatchewan Liberal Party