For Immediate Release

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Press Release: CIJA Applauds Passage of Bill Banning Genetic Discrimination

Ottawa, ON – Today, the House of Commons voted to pass Bill S-201 (the Genetic Non-Discrimination Act) at Third Reading.

In response, David J. Cape, Chair of CIJA, issued the following statement:

“We applaud all MPs who voted to pass Bill S-201. We are especially grateful for the unwavering leadership of former Senator James Cowan and MP Rob Oliphant in driving this initiative forward.

“The enactment of Bill S-201 will establish a national ban on genetic discrimination, a milestone in protecting the health and wellbeing of all Canadians. Everyone should feel comfortable to take potentially life-saving genetic tests without fear of punitive consequences.

“As this is an issue of overlapping federal-provincial responsibility, we encourage the provinces to bring forward complementary legislation to provide full protection against genetic discrimination for all Canadians.”

Background:

- Establishing laws to ban genetic discrimination is among CIJA’s top priorities, which is why CIJA has engaged federal and provincial parliamentarians across party lines seeking support for this initiative.
- CIJA is a leading member of the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness.
- Canada has invested billions of dollars in promising genome research. Genetic testing is increasingly crucial in identifying predisposition to several major illnesses and thus enabling patients to take preventive measures proven to save lives. Unfortunately, fearing abuse of test results by employers, insurers or others, many Canadians refuse to undergo genetic testing.
- Some communities are disproportionately inclined to inherit genetic markers associated with major diseases. Jewish women of European descent, for example, are significantly more likely than other Canadian women to carry the BRCA marker connected with ovarian and breast cancer. Some First Nations, French Canadian, African, and South Asian communities are similarly more likely to carry markers associated with certain illnesses and as a result are also vulnerable to genetic discrimination.
Bill S-201 sought to make it illegal to discriminate based on one’s genetic information. Prior to S-201, Canada was the only G7 country without specific protections against genetic discrimination.

In the 2015 federal election, the Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats all pledged to support legislation banning genetic discrimination.

Bill S-201 was introduced in the Senate by Senator James Cowan, where it passed unanimously in April 2016. Bill S-201 was subsequently introduced in the House of Commons by MP Rob Oliphant, where it received unanimous support at Second Reading and in the Justice Committee.

Bill S-201 will now be returned to the Senate for approval of minor technical amendments. Having already received unanimous support in the Senate, these amendments are likely to be approved – ensuring that Bill S-201 is quickly passed into law.

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The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) is the advocacy agent of the Jewish Federations of Canada-UIA.

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