Dear Type MLA/Minister Name,

While our council was expecting a tough provincial budget, nothing prepared us for the significant cuts that your government delivered on March 22.

As you know, the provincial municipal revenue sharing agreement dedicates one point of the PST to the province’s municipalities, including Municipality Name. This predictable formula meant we prepared a budget already accounting for a hit in funding from the province.

Then we were blindsided by your the $36 million cut of SaskPower and SaskEnergy payments in lieu to 109 urban municipalities. Hometowns were shocked by this massive cut, that was done without consultation with our sector — because mentioning the words “grants in lieu” in a speech at convention does not a consultation make. Many hometowns now face a fiscal crisis. These cuts have left us facing a massive reduction in provincial funding, and nowhere left to cut.

We were hopeful after the mayors of Saskatoon, Regina and Yorkton, and SUMA President Gordon Barnhart secured a meeting with four cabinet ministers to discuss our concerns days after the budget was released. But the promise of further consultation and discussion was broken with your government’s March 31 press release that you would cap the payments in lieu cuts — for nine hometowns, and only at 30 per cent of their revenue sharing amount. Hometowns are still scrambling to find a way to make up for these cuts by the your government. INSERT LOCAL EXAMPLE HERE (i.e. In Saskatoon, cutting services to fill the $10.6 million shortfall would eliminate all the city’s leisure programs for a year.)

A surprise announcement less than two days after you promised to work *with* us was a shock, to say the least. This unilateral decision to cap the payments in lieu clawback, and the April 5 introduction of Bill 64 show a complete lack of respect from your government for the municipalities that spent the last decade providing critical services and creating the quality of life Saskatchewan people count on.

The meeting between the Province and SUMA representatives seems to have been nothing more than misdirection and placation, not consultation in good faith. This budget has pitted groups against each other, including municipalities. We are particularly dismayed at the divisive politicking employed by your government, and enraged by Bill 64’s draconian measures to curtail the democratic right of municipalities to challenge your indefensible expropriation of payments in lieu, which have been enshrined in contracts for more than 50 years.

Hometowns across the province are being scapegoated, forced to pass what amount to provincial tax increases onto our residents through increased property taxes — one of the only levers available for municipalities to pull — while grappling with the ever-expanding list of provincial responsibilities downloaded to the order of government with the least options available to generate revenue.

Of course hometowns are grateful for municipal revenue sharing, but let us not forget that it was specifically designed to compensate for the provincial interest in the services municipalities deliver. However, since the program began, your government has used it as an excuse to keep passing the buck to municipalities. This continual downloading is gutting the integrity of revenue sharing, and making a complete mockery of the government-to-government partnership SUMA and its members worked so hard to develop.

On top of the payments in lieu stolen from 109 hometowns, your budget suspended the Community Rink Affordability Program and the Main Street Saskatchewan Program; eliminated STC; further reduced funding to urban parks; and slashed funding to libraries and the Urban Highway Connector Program (UHCP). Your government added insult to injury with the last two. Even the Premier admitted during the bear pit at SUMA Convention in February that the UHCP was a clear case of downloading, and most recently, your education minister specifically told libraries they should have gone back to municipalities for more money after the devastating cuts this budget unleashed on them.

This budget hurts hometowns. The Premier has told us to drain our rainy day funds after spending 10 years on the front lines of exceptional growth, providing the programs, services, and infrastructure we all rely on every day — not profiting.

Did you know almost 80 per cent of Saskatchewan’s population lives in our cities, towns, villages, resort villages, and northern municipalities? That these hometowns appear in every constituency of the province? That these hometowns provide core services and infrastructure that are essential to quality of life? Hometowns provide, among other things, safe drinking water; wastewater management; streets and bridges; police and fire services; snow clearing; public transit; recreation, arts, and culture facilities and programming; economic and community development; garbage and recycling collection. Hometowns are where people want to live, work, and play.

And yet now, despite believing we were long-standing **partners** in building our Saskatchewan, our hometowns have been left with essentially two options: slash programs and services or hike property taxes.

We are calling on your government to stop downloading provincial responsibilities onto hometowns, and to reverse the decisions to cut payments in lieu, eliminate STC, and gut our libraries. In short: Stop hurting our hometowns.

Sincerely,

Mayor Name

Municipality