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Toronto Board of Rabbis Statement on Genetic Discrimination

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Canada remains the only G7 nation without specific protections in place to prevent genetic discrimination. As a result, Canadians who undergo genetic testing can be compelled by insurance companies and employers to disclose their results and may be denied employment or insurance based on their genes. Further, governments continue to invest billions of dollars in promising genome research, the benefits of which will be diminished and degraded due to genetic discrimination.

As rabbis, we uphold the Jewish imperative to preserve, protect and save lives. Given the increasingly important role of genetic testing in identifying, treating, and preventing disease, we are concerned that individuals may decide not to be tested for genetic diseases for fear of being discriminated against. We are concerned that failure to safeguard genetic test information will have moral ramifications, as individuals are made vulnerable to being targeted and penalized for conditions outside of their control, and members of ethnic groups with higher risk for particular genetic diseases are made vulnerable to ethnic and racial discrimination. These dangers can have lasting consequences for the health and wellbeing of all Canadians.

Concerted action is required at both federal and provincial levels to ensure that Canadians cannot be discriminated against based on their genes, regardless of where they work or reside.

Therefore:

- We encourage all Members of Parliament to support Bill S-201, the Genetic Non-Discrimination Act, which was passed by the Senate in April 2016.
- As insurance and employment are provincial responsibilities, we encourage provincial legislatures to pass complementary legislation, with a specific focus on employment and insurance.

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