

October 28, 2009

Premier Gordon Campbell,  
Victoria, BC  
[premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Premier Campbell,

In 2001, you promised to stand up for BC's vulnerable children as a priority. Months later, your government ordered 23% cuts to children's programs. In 2005, you outlined five Great Goals –#3 was to **“build the best system of support in Canada”** for children with special needs and those at risk. But your government's actions since then suggest you have forgotten your promise to create a legacy of strong, safe and well-supported children.

While BC enjoyed record budget surpluses, waitlists for critical services that support vulnerable children in and out of school have grown longer. Now your Ministers are cutting millions from core programs, including autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), mental health, infant development, supported child development and Aboriginal programs. Specialized staff are being lost, with one program given just a month to wrap up. Front-line children's agencies were forced to cut \$3.6 million more. A further \$32 million is being cut from essential Ministry roles for monitoring, oversight and support to assure children's welfare and safety. And yet another Ministry re-structuring will further strain the capacity to support vulnerable children.

There was no risk assessment or advance public discussion of these cuts. Apart from a token increase for one small sub-group (700 children with autism under age 6), savings will not reduce waitlists or improve access for the vast majority – i.e. for tens of thousands of children with special needs who are still waiting.

Provincial organizations for people with disabilities, children with special needs and families have protested the cuts. Professionals represented by the Health Sciences Association of BC strongly denounced funding cuts and the loss of autism programs. Desperate parents have pleaded with your Ministers to save these programs, noting the huge strides their children have made and the strong evidence base that underlies them, in terms of both efficacy and long-term savings.

Premier Campbell, these cuts to children's programs are just a matter of priorities. Your revised budget commits \$14 billion to capital projects. Alberta spends twice as much on autism despite fewer children and is not cutting programs despite a deficit twice as large as BC's.

Since our children can't speak out or fight back against these cuts, it is our job as parents and citizens to speak up for them. And it is your job to honour the promises you made to BC's kids by protecting and rebuilding vitally important supports and services. We know that British Columbians don't want to see BC's budget balanced on the back of our most vulnerable children.

Please join us on October 28 by standing up and doing what you know is the right thing to do.