

May, 2003

The Honourable Lynn Stephens
Minister of State for Women's Equality
Parliament Buildings
PO Box 9056
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Stephens:

Over the last month, you have provided information to the community about some of the key elements of your government's long-term planning for child care.

While we appreciate the information, regrettably, families and caregivers across BC continue to report significant concerns about the impact of your government's actions on children, families, communities and child care services.

In response, we would like to reiterate some key concerns that we have shared with you many times over the last year.

- X We must take exception with your statement that you are 'increasing' the income threshold for Child Care Subsidy by \$100 a month. In reality, you are reducing earlier cuts to the income threshold from \$285 a month to \$185 a month. This still leaves families further behind than they were in 2001 and does nothing to redress the harm caused by other changes to subsidy such as eliminating pre-school subsidies for low and moderate income children whose mothers are not in the paid labour force or an approved training program and by denying subsidies to families who qualify for \$50 a month or less.
- X In the absence of adequate funding that moves child care from a user fee system to one funded, like other public programs, through the tax system, cuts to the subsidy program have been the most damaging element of your government's child care policy. Licensed child care that serves low and moderate income communities have lost subsidized children and many have vacancies. These children are either in unregulated settings or on their own before and after school. This is in spite of the research which demonstrates an indisputable link between standards of care, quality and positive childhood outcomes.
- X The new Child Care Operating Funding program exacerbates the damage done by subsidy cuts. As we have pointed out before, because this program is based on enrolment, it will entrench a two tiered child care system in BC. Fully enrolled programs, generally those that serve families who can manage to pay full fees, will do better. Programs with vacancies, generally because they serve communities where families cannot afford to pay full fees, will receive less and spaces will be lost.
- X The total budget for the new child care operating funding program is \$14 million less than the budget for the 4 grant programs it replaces. Further, these funds are not tied to caregiver remuneration or affordable parent fees. We fully expect that as a result, wages will go down and fees will go up. In fact, this is already occurring. We fail to see how this increases families' options or how it demonstrates respect for the women who care for our children.
- X We are, at best, confused about your government's plans for the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRRs) Programs. In 2002, you announced that you intended to 'defund' the CCRRs, the One Stop Access (OSA) Sites and the provincial services of Westcoast Child

Care Resource Centre. Recent correspondence from government reiterates the decision to end funding for CCRRs as of March 31, 2004, yet you also talk about plans to 'refocus' the CCRRs through a new Quality Enhancement Initiative. Does this mean that you no longer intend to 'defund' these services? Or, as we assume, does this actually mean that you will provide a much reduced budget that will lead to a loss of services? As you have heard repeatedly, the CCRRs, OSAs and Westcoast play a critical role in supporting families, caregivers and communities and are the face of 'child care' in many parts of the province. The role they play will not be replaced through on-line parent referral services, an exclusive focus on family child care and a small number of regional services that do not have the resources to serve large geographic areas.

- X While we acknowledge the potential benefit of consolidating child care related programs, such as subsidy and the Early Childhood Educators' registry in one Ministry, it has been our experience that on its own, this does not ensure coordination or progress. In fact, in the past, operational problems have emerged when the subsidy program was the responsibility of one ministry but was delivered by another. Further, these consolidations still do not address the highly problematic division that exists between your Ministry's child care policies and the early childhood policies and strategies of the Ministry for Children and Family Development.

Based on these and other concerns and the on-going challenges faced by families and caregivers, it is our conclusion that the key elements you describe do **not** constitute an effective long term plan that supports families, children and child care providers throughout BC.

We do note that you intend to use the new federal dollars under the Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care to build on your long-term child care strategy. While we support the dedicated use of the new federal funds for licensed child care, we are very concerned about the limited funds available under this agreement. There is however a solution. If your government was prepared to accept the First Call consensus position that 2/3's of the federal Early Childhood Development funds be allocated to child care, you could then supplement this with the new early learning and child care funds. This would give you \$47.3 million for child care this year – which could actually begin to make a difference.

We continue to call on you and your government to:

- ✓ Reverse the child care funding cuts that are destabilizing child care in BC
- ✓ Withdraw your plans for further child care cuts over the next two years
- ✓ Develop and implement a comprehensive 5-year plan that moves child care from a user fee system to one funded, like other public programs, through the tax system.

Sincerely,

BC Association of Child Care Services
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Early Childhood Educators of BC
School Age Child Care Association
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
Western Canada Family Child Care Association
BC Government and Service Employees' Union
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

BC Parent Voices
BC Association of Social Workers
BC Coalition of Women's Centres
Country Grove Children's Centre
Kelowna Child Care Society
Cariboo Child Care Society
North Shore Community Resources
Justice for Girls
Developmental Disabilities Association
Trail and Castlegar Child Care Resource and Referral
Parents For Child Care
SFU Childcare Society
Burnaby New Westminster Family Child Care Association
Academic Women of Simon Fraser University
Kiwassa Neighbourhood Services Association
Golden Bear Children's Centre
Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregiver Rights
Revelstoke Community Childcare Society
Teddy Bear Daycare
Peace Arch Nutrition Consultants
Kiwassa Harbour View Daycare
West Wood Players Ltd.
assn francophone de Campbell River
Campbell River Child Care Society
Kamloops School Age Services Working Group
Seniors Network BC
Campbell River Child Care Planning Committee
Richmond Child Care Resource and Referral
End Legislated Poverty
Dawson Creek Branch ECEBC
Campaign 2000 ECEC Community Indicators Project
St. David's Preschool Society
West Kootenay Family and Childcare Services Society
Tenth Avenue Alliance Wee Care Daycare
Spare Time Child Care Society
West Kootenay Infant Development Program
Starbright Educare Daycare
East Kootenay Supported Child Care
Nanaimo Women's Resource Centre
UBC Childcare Services
Sea to Sky Community Services Society
Hastings Townsite Childcare Society
Kootenay Family Place
Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver