

Child Care Advocacy Forum

#300 - 210 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5Y 3W2
Phone: (604) 515-6257
Toll Free: 1-877-361-1116
Fax: (604) 709-5662
www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum

Participating Organizations:

BC Association of
Child Care Services

Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC

Early Childhood
Educators of BC

School Age Child Care
Association of BC

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

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VANCOUVER
FOUNDATION

Submission to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Pre-Budget Consultation

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INTRODUCTION

The BC Child Care Advocacy Forum is an alliance of 6 provincial child care organizations that brings together over 4,000 individuals, groups and service providers in BC. Since 1999, the Advocacy Forum has worked to advance a "Common Vision and Agenda for Child Care Services in BC".
(http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum/common_agenda.html)

The work of the Advocacy Forum is based on the accumulated evidence of over three decades of research. This growing body of research affirms the need for a comprehensive child care system in BC; the benefits of public investment in quality child care for children, families, and society at large; and the degree to which our province and country are lagging behind other developed societies in addressing this issue.

Based on this, the Advocacy Forum works for a child care system in BC that, amongst other things:

- ✓ Entitles all children to access quality child care programs regardless of their families' economic or employment status.
- ✓ Provides families with choices from a range of coordinated, quality, licensed, and regulated child care programs.
- ✓ Is publicly funded through the tax system and is affordable for all families who want or need to use it.
- ✓ Is complemented by a comprehensive family policy that includes extended parental leave and progressive family/work policies.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Over the last 3 years, the Advocacy Forum has shared with government and the public our growing concerns about the negative impact of provincial funding cuts and policy changes on access to quality child care in BC.

Public reports show that annual provincial funding for child care (not including Supported Child Care) has decreased by \$42 million - from a high of \$198 million in 2001/02 to a low of \$156 million in 2004/05¹.

These cuts have had devastating impacts on children, families and child care programs. Some of the most troubling impacts include:

- Thousands of families have lost all or part of their provincial child care subsidy and were left with no choice but to withdraw their children from quality care.
- Many programs, particularly those serving lower income communities, closed their doors and others struggle to stay open with reduced revenues. In many cases, the only option for programs has been to increase fees.

- A two-tiered system was entrenched through the Child Care Operating Funding program, which provides public funds to child care programs based on enrolment only. As a result, fully enrolled programs serving neighbourhoods where families can afford to pay full fees receive more funds than programs in lower income communities where there are vacancies because families cannot afford to pay.
- Many early childhood educators have had their already low wages further reduced and Early Childhood Education training programs in communities have closed making access to training even harder to come by.
- One Stop Access programs which helped families access the provincial child care subsidy system were eliminated. Access to the subsidy program has been centralized through Regional Service Centres, making it even more difficult for families to access the program, particularly those in remote areas or whose first language is not English.
- Child Care Resource and Referral Programs, which support parents and caregivers across BC, have had their budgets significantly reduced with resulting service reductions.

These devastating cuts have occurred in spite of the fact that, over the last four years, BC has received close to \$250 million from the federal government for child care and early childhood¹.

This year alone, BC has approximately \$94 million dollars available through federal transfer payments that could be invested in child care and other early childhood programs¹. Had the government followed community advice and allocated 2/3 of the federal funds it receives through the Early Childhood Development Agreement to child care and all of the funds it receives under the Multilateral Framework to regulated child care – as it is required to do – BC would have an additional \$69 million to invest directly into child care¹. Regrettably, only \$9 million has been allocated to the child care budget to date.²

In fact, had BC followed the Advocacy Forum's previous advice to this Committee, by restoring provincial child care funding to 2001/02 levels and using federal funds as suggested, the total child care budget this year could be \$267 million. Sadly, the 2004/05 budget is only \$165 million², falling \$102 million short of this goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The pre-budget Consultation Paper projects a significant provincial surplus and asks British Columbians how it can best be spent. Our recommendations are based on our first hand knowledge of the price that young children, families and child care providers in BC have paid to date.

We therefore recommend that the provincial 2005/06 budget:

1. Restore provincial child care funding to the 2001/02 level of \$198 million.
2. Use federal early childhood development and child care transfer funds to supplement, rather than replace provincial funds, with a goal of a combined annual child care budget from federal and provincial sources of \$267 million.
3. Use any additional federal funds that may come to BC as a result of commitments made during the June 2004 election to further build the child care system.
4. Develop a five year implementation plan that moves child care from a user fee system to a publicly funded one.

References:

¹ "Public Funding for Child Care in BC", L. Anderson, YWCA Canada, June, 2004.

² "\$4.9 Million for Child Care ...", Child Care Advocacy Forum, August, 2004.