

## TIPS FOR MEETINGS WITH MLAs

1. **Call your MLA's local constituency office, identify yourself as a constituent** and ask for a meeting to talk about child care. Be clear that you need to talk to them NOW about government's paper "Building a Better Future for B.C. Kids".
2. **Don't take NO for an answer.** If your MLA is reluctant to meet with you, remind them that their government has asked for public input and debate about child care. Let them know that there is a growing provincial campaign calling on their government to act on child care and that you expect them to do their part.
3. **Find 2 or 3 people to go to the meeting with you.** Be sure to **include parents** who are **voters in this riding**. Get your group together before the meeting to plan who will cover each item on the agenda. *A suggested agenda is attached.*
4. Help **send a consistent message** to every MLA by highlighting the key points outlined in the attached "Suggested Agenda"
5. **Ask your MLA for a firm commitment** that they will raise child care issues in caucus and will support action on child care during this government's term of office.
6. **Leave a package of materials** with your MLA including two attached documents from the Child Care Advocacy Forum:
  - the "Common Agenda and Vision for Child Care Services in B.C."
  - the "December, 1999 Response to "Building a Better Future for B.C. Kids".
7. **Get in touch with others in your riding who may also be setting up meetings.** Its just fine if your MLA has a few meetings on child care, but touch bases with some key contacts including members of the Provincial Child Care Council who live in your community; the President of your local branch of ECE B.C. and your local Child Care Resource and Referral Program, etc.

*Remember - the MLA is your elected representative. It is their job to listen to and represent your concerns. You don't have to be an expert or have all the answers. If they ask a question you can't answer, tell them you will get back to them with the information and then return to your key points. Stay focused on your own experiences, let your MLA know that you expect action and you can't go wrong!*

## SUGGESTED AGENDA FOR MLA MEETINGS

1. **Introductions**
  - Introduce all group members, highlighting their connection to child care.
2. **Building a Better Future for B.C. Kids**
  - Don't assume your MLA knows about this discussion paper. Make sure they understand that their government has asked for public debate and input. Tell them that thousands of British Columbians have already told Minister Sihota that we expect action.
  - Let them know that, while the discussion paper paints an accurate picture of the problems and challenges, it doesn't go far enough!
3. **Local Issues**
  - Describe some concrete child care problems facing families, children and child care providers in your community.
4. **Key Messages** - Highlight these key points:
  - The options included in "Building a Better Future for B.C. Kids" **are only stop gap measures** and will not build a child care system for B.C.
  - We are calling on the federal and provincial governments to make a commitment to a publicly funded system that **entitles ALL children to affordable, quality early childhood services**.
  - The next **Federal Budget** must be a **Children's Budget** with a first year allocation of \$2 billion for the development of child care services.
  - The **Provincial Government** must develop a child care system for B.C. that entitles every child to quality child care regardless of the economic or employment status of parents.
  - We need **a significant increase in spending on child care in the next provincial budget** to raise the province's share to 50% of total child care costs in B.C.

*(For more details on these key messages, see the attached "Response...")*
4. **Get a Commitment**
  - Tell your MLA that you expect them to raise child care in caucus and to support action on child care during this government's term of office.
  - Press them for a firm commitment to act.
5. **Next Steps**
  - Ask for a date by which your MLA will report back to you on what they have done.
  - Leave your package of materials.
  - Thank them for their time.
  - Remind them that child care matters to their constituents.

## GOOD RESPONSES TO TOUGH QUESTIONS

### If your MLA says:

Our government has already done a lot for child care.

The public doesn't want us to spend more money.

It will cost too much and we don't have the money.

### You can respond:

It's true that the NDP has increased the child care budget and created more spaces. But, child care is still too expensive, wages are still too low and services are still fragile. There has been no increase in subsidy rates for over 5 years. The last time we went this long without an increase was 1984-89, under the Social Credit government. While we don't think the subsidy system is the way to go, we do expect this government to act on its party's long standing child care policy.

On this issue, the public is ahead of the politicians. A poll conducted in Oct. 1999 shows that more than 75% of British Columbians want the federal and provincial governments to give a high priority to public funding for quality child care services in their upcoming budgets.

There is always money for what politicians decide is a priority (eg. Fast Ferries, a new bridge in Kelowna). We spend \$28 billion a year in Canada on public education (\$42 billion when we include post-secondary education) but only \$1 billion on child care even though the research clearly proves that the early years matter most. We know that for every \$1 invested in child care for all, there will be a \$2 return. The real problem is not lack of funds, it is that young children and their families are still not a priority for government.

## **If your MLA says:**

How much will it cost?

Wouldn't it be better to put more money into families' hands by reducing taxes?

You should go to the Federal government. They have cut our transfer payments, and we can't do anything unless they provide funds.

## **You can respond:**

Parents now spend \$1.35 billion a year on child care fees in B.C. and the province spends under \$200 million which is less than 15% of the total cost. We are calling for government to increase spending in the next budget to cover 50% of the total costs. This will still be considerably less than the \$7 billion spent on health care in B.C. and the \$3.7 billion spent on K -12 education. Yet, we know that quality child care improves health and education outcomes for children. With matching funds from the federal government, increased provincial spending will make a significant difference. How much are you prepared to spend on child care in the next budget?

Tax cuts are not a substitute for a comprehensive child care program. Economists report that examples of provincial tax cuts in Canada, and federal and state tax cuts in the US, haven't made a real difference for average income families. A typical family might save enough money to buy a cup of coffee every day but certainly not enough to meet their child care needs or to make it possible for one parent to leave paid employment. Tax cuts will not create one more quality child care space. Recent polls indicate that, when given open-ended choices, Canadians would rather see our surplus invested in programs like Medicare, education, job creation, child poverty, child care, and debt reduction.

We are actively lobbying the Federal government for funding and expect the province to take a leadership role in making child care a priority at the federal/provincial tables. But, we expect this province to act regardless of what happens federally. NDP party policy calls for strong public policy on child care and this government should act on those principles.

<b>CHILD CARE ADVOCACY FORUM MLA MEETING RESPONSE FORM</b>
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YOUR NAME:\_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION\_\_\_\_\_

PH\_\_\_\_\_ Fax\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

YOUR PROVINCIAL RIDING\_\_\_\_\_

NAME AND PARTY AFFILIATION OF YOUR MLA\_\_\_\_\_

**If you have met with your MLA, please answer the following questions:**

Date of meeting:\_\_\_\_\_

Who attended the meeting (names and relevant affiliations)?

What were the key points raised at the meeting? How did your MLA respond and what commitments did s/he make?

Were there questions that you felt unable to answer? If so, which ones?

**If you have been unable to meet with your MLA, please let us know why.**

Please fax this form to Nicky Byres c/o Child Care Advocacy Forum at (604) 709-5662

**THANK YOU!**