

# Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a publicly funded, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

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## **\$455 million for child care is at risk but Premier Campbell is still silent**

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On March 31, 2007 the federal government plans to cancel the BC/Canada Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC). This Agreement, signed in Sept. 2005, was far from perfect but it did give BC an opportunity to begin building the child care system that children and families need and deserve.

Under the 5 year ELCC Agreement, BC was to receive \$633 million from the federal government for regulated child care. BC received the first two years of funding but if the Agreement is cancelled at the end of this fiscal year, BC will lose the remaining \$455 million in dedicated child care funds.

**In the face of this loss, Premier Campbell is silent.** He has not made one public statement calling on the Prime Minister to honour the Agreement and has not made child care a priority in negotiations with the new federal government.

Compare this to the stand taken by other Premiers and provinces.

- Ontario's Premier said, "...we signed an agreement with the government of Canada and we intend to put pressure on Prime Minister Stephen Harper that he respect this agreement."
- Saskatchewan's Legislature passed a resolution expressing its dissatisfaction with the federal government's decision to cancel early learning and child care agreements with provinces.
- Quebec's Premier asked Mr. Harper to abide by the agreement that was signed with his province, saying that the new government is welcome to give families \$1,200 per child as long as those payments do not undermine the existing deal.
- Manitoba's Minister of Family Services and Housing, Christine Melnick publicly stated that she wants the existing deals to continue.
- New Brunswick's Leader of the Opposition tabled a motion in the legislature asking the federal government to reverse its decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Agreement.

Judging from Premier Campbell's silence, we can only assume that he does not have the political will to build a quality child care system.

Here's the evidence.

- X Since 2002, BC cut \$40 million from annual provincial spending on child care and used existing federal early childhood development funds for 'anything but child care'.
- X All new child care spending in BC has been paid for with federal funds.
- X BC was only prepared to make a commitment to the most minimal accountability measures in its ELCC Agreement.
- X In spite of a growing crisis in BC's child care system, BC only spent \$55 million of the \$92 million it received from the federal government last year - most of which went into patching up current funding gaps rather than into making fundamental changes.
- X Under the ELCC Agreement, BC made a commitment to release a provincial Child Care Action Plan on January 31, 2006. Now that this federal requirement is gone – we are told not to expect a plan any time soon.

More evidence suggests that BC's Ministry of Finance may now be in the child care driver's seat. Minister of Finance, Carol Taylor, says that while BC may lose hundreds of millions dedicated to spending on child care, she expects to get more from the new federal government for other priorities like the pine beetle infestation.

Is BC really prepared to use federal child care funds as a bargaining chip in exchange for increases in other federal funding? And, in the long term, is BC's finance ministry really angling for a bigger lump sum transfer – none of which has to be spent on child care?

We hope the Premier is prepared to stand up for child care.

Here's what he can do.

1. Introduce a motion in the BC Legislature calling on the federal government to honour the Federal-Provincial Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care.
2. Work with other Premiers to make multi-year federal child care funding a priority.
3. Direct the Minister of Children and Family Development and the Minister of State for Child Care to release a Child Care Action Plan that moves BC from a patchwork of user fee services to a quality, affordable, community-based child care system.
4. Restore provincial funds cut from child care and make a commitment to spend **all** federal child care funds building a system of regulated care.

And, BC's Official Opposition has a role to play too. If Premier Campbell doesn't introduce a motion in support of the federal-provincial child care agreement – the Official Opposition can and should.

BC children, families and child care service providers are anxiously awaiting real action!