



L416-4480 Oak Street, Vancouver V6H 3V4  
Phone: (604) 875-3629/1-800-307-1212  
Fax: (604) 875-3569  
E-mail: [info@firstcallbc.org](mailto:info@firstcallbc.org) <http://www.firstcallbc.org>

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SOME ADVICE TO KEN DRYDEN ON CHILD CARE:  
GET IT RIGHT OR DON'T BOTHER**

First Call, the BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, urges Social Development Minister Ken Dryden to insist on the highest standards for child care when he continues negotiations with his provincial and territorial counterparts later this week.

“Just reaching a deal - any deal - isn’t good enough,” said First Call Chair Michael Goldberg. “What we are looking for is a deal to promote the development of a high-quality, publicly funded, non-profit child care system.”

“Our message to the federal government on child care is short and simple: either get it right or don’t bother. A deal based on the lowest common denominator is not worth pursuing.”

The ministers are scheduled to meet on February 11 in Vancouver in hopes of concluding their talks on child care. A deal would be the prelude to a formal announcement in the 2005 federal budget speech.

Child care has been on and off the public agenda - mostly off - since the 1970 report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Since 1970, too many governments have bumbled and stumbled their way through child care policies that were ill-conceived, poorly funded and sometimes even harmful to children.

Quebec is the only province that has taken child care seriously. Elsewhere in Canada, the demand for care outstrips the supply many times over.

First Call recognizes that building a top-quality system will take years to complete, but we believe that governments need to act right now to spell out precisely what kind of system they will be building.

Provincial and territorial governments are free to pursue their own spending priorities with their own money, but there have to be clear and enforceable standards with respect to the use of transfer payments from the federal government for child care.

“Now is the time for the federal government to show its leadership and resolve,” said Goldberg. “Federal dollars should go only to child care that meets the highest standards.”

All the negotiations on child care to date have been done behind closed doors, making public input into the process all but impossible. After their last meeting in November, the ministers issued a news release talking about provincial/territorial flexibility, and principles such as quality, universally inclusive, accessible, and child care with a developmental component, but they did not provide many details.

First Call believes the public should see all the details of any new child care plan before it is cast in stone. It also wants a firm commitment to a system funded primarily by the public purse rather than parents, a system that features well-trained and well-paid caregivers, and a system in which future expansion happens through non-profit delivery.

First Call's concerns about the way federal funds are used for child care arise directly from the practices of the current BC government. Federal funds for child care and early childhood development have increased modestly since 2000, but the provincial government made major cuts to its own child care funding starting in 2001. BC is also the only province that subsidizes unlicensed child care.

“We believe federal funds should be used to build a high-quality child care system in BC and elsewhere in Canada,” said Goldberg. “Federal funds should not be used to shore up the weakest aspects of the existing patchwork of services or to allow provinces and territories to divert child care funds to other programs.”

First Call is a non-partisan coalition of provincial and regional organizations, mobilized communities, and individuals concerned about the well-being of children and youth.

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For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Michael Goldberg, First Call Chair  
604-718-7738