

April 21, 2011

Adrian Dix  
Leader of the Opposition  
Via e-mail

Dear Adrian Dix:

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition congratulates you on your leadership victory and wishes you well in your new role as leader of the BC New Democratic Party.

We appreciated that in the midst of a very busy leadership race you took the time to give thoughtful answers to our leadership candidate questionnaire on child and youth issues. In that response you talked about your understanding of the social and economic costs of rising inequality and the research underpinning that understanding. You also reaffirmed your support for creating a better, more affordable universal child care system, providing additional resources for public education, developing a provincial poverty reduction plan, and improving child labour protections, among the many issues you touched upon. We thank you for these commitments.

In our recent letter to Premier Christy Clark we offered a list of priority recommendations for her consideration related to the well-being of BC's children, youth and families. We list these recommendations again below for your reference.

- Support families' ability to work and enhance child development opportunities by creating a provincial non-profit child care system that offers high quality, affordable and accessible care to all children. The current situation of high parent fees, too few spaces, and under-paid early childhood educators is in urgent need of systemic reform.
- Recognizing the toxic role poverty plays in undermining children's health and development, adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines and regular public reporting on progress.
- Embrace the government's leadership role in making sure families are lifted out of poverty by encouraging employers in both the public and private sectors to pay living wages, that is, wages that provide a basic level of economic security. No parent should be required to work so many hours that he or she is deprived of time for parenting, which is what happens when wages are so low that parents must work multiple jobs to make ends meet.
- Many important government subsidies and benefits have income thresholds that are much too low, and are clawed back so quickly that modest-income families face some of the highest marginal tax rates in the province. For example, many modest-income families (despite struggling with a bare-bones budget) do not qualify for the low-income carbon tax credit, the sales tax credit, the rental assistance program, MSP premium assistance, or provincial child care subsidies. This can be rectified with smart fiscal policy.
- Reform BC's income assistance policies to better support parents and children's healthy development, including raising inadequate shelter and support rates, indexing them, and restoring earnings and child support exemptions. Restore the exemption from seeking work for parents of young children, at least until a quality child care system is in place. Revise the rates for parents/grandparents with children with disabilities to better reflect their extra needs.
- Increase government's efforts to end homelessness and increase the availability of safe and affordable housing for low-income families.

- Work with the federal government to achieve enhanced parenting leave through the Employment Insurance system with adequate income supports for all parents of young children.
- Ensure BC's public schools have sufficient funding to deliver on their promise of equitable opportunity for all children, regardless of ability or income level. Parents should not have to fundraise for their children's public education, and the current reliance on this creates inequities between schools. Necessary supports for children with special needs should not be so scarce.
- Work with relevant provincial ministries (e.g. Children and Families, Health) to ensure equitable access to prevention and early intervention services for children, youth and families in every community throughout BC.
- Ensure the Ministry of Children and Family Development has sufficient funding to carry out its child protection mandate with integrity, based on high standards of practice. Improve supports for youth in care as they transition to adulthood.
- After BC's work-start age was lowered to 12 years old, accepted work-related injury claims for 12 to 14-year-old children increased ten-fold. Raise the work-start age in BC back up to 15 and strengthen protections for young people at work, e.g. prohibited hours of work, prohibited occupations, and other best practices.
- Introduce legislation banning cosmetic pesticides to protect children's health and their natural environment.

As you know, First Call's 90 partner organizations and even broader network of individuals have extensive knowledge of family policy issues. Their range of expertise includes child care, parenting supports, immigrant and refugee settlement, education, taxation, labour, First Nations, social assistance, disabilities and other areas. You and your colleagues are always welcome to attend our coalition meetings and other forums to gather informed and diverse perspectives on child and youth issues.

We look forward to working with you to achieve our many common objectives for improving support for all of BC's children and youth and wish you well in your new role.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Montani  
Provincial Coordinator

## Provincial and Regional Partner Organizations

Adoptive Families Association of BC  
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies  
Alternate Shelter Society  
Association for Community Education BC  
Assoc. of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia  
Autism Community Training Society  
Autism Society of BC  
BC Aboriginal Child Care Society  
BC Association for Child Development & Intervention  
BC Association for Community Living  
BC Association of Child Care Employers  
BC Association of Family Resource Programs  
BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs  
BC Association of Social Workers  
BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities  
BC Council for Families  
BC Crime Prevention Association  
BC Federation of Foster Parents Association  
BC Government & Service Employees' Union  
BC Pediatric Society  
BC Play Therapy Association  
BC Recreation and Parks Association  
BC School Trustees' Association  
BC Society for Public Education  
BC Society of Transition Houses  
BC Teachers' Federation  
Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Boys and Girls Clubs of BC  
Breakfast for Learning BC & Yukon  
Canadian Association for Young Children  
Canadian Federation of Students - BC  
Canadian Jewish Congress, Pacific Region  
Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division  
Canadian Red Cross – RespectEd  
Capilano Students' Union  
Caring for First Nations Children Society  
CASA of Greater Victoria  
Cerebral Palsy Association of BC  
Child and Family Counseling Association  
Child and Youth Care Association of BC  
Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC  
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Columbia/Kootenay Advocacy and Education Resource  
Communities that Care, Squamish  
Community Action Toward Children's Health  
Council of Parent Participation Preschools BC  
Deaf Children's Society of BC  
Developmental Disabilities Association  
Dietitians of Canada, BC Region  
Directorate of Agencies for School Health BC  
Early Childhood Educators of BC

East Kootenay Childhood Coalition  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver  
Family Services of Greater Vancouver  
Federated Anti-Poverty Groups  
Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks  
Federation of Community Social Services of BC  
Health Officer's Council of British Columbia  
Helping Spirit Lodge  
Hospital Employees' Union  
Immigrant Services Society of BC  
Infant Development Program of BC  
Island JADE Society  
Justice Institute of BC  
Learning Disabilities Association of BC  
Literacy BC  
Mary Manning Centre  
McCreary Centre Society  
MOSAIC  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Pacific Association of First Nations Women  
Pacific Community Resources Society  
Pacific Immigrant Resources Society  
PARCA  
Parent Support Services Society of BC  
PeerNetBC  
Penticton & District Community Resources Society  
Phoenix Human Services Association  
PLEA Community Services Society of BC  
Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society  
Public Health Association of BC  
Social Planning & Research Council of BC  
Society for Children and Youth of BC  
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.  
Sunshine Coast Community Services Society  
Take a Hike Youth At Risk Foundation  
Toxic Free Canada  
United Way of the Lower Mainland  
University Women's Club of Vancouver  
Vancouver Coastal Health – Population Health  
West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund  
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre  
Westcoast Family Resources Society  
Western Society for Children  
YWCA of Greater Vancouver

### *Liaisons*

BC Representative for Children and Youth  
Public Health Agency of Canada  
Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC