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**CHILD POVERTY RATE DROPS SIGNIFICANTLY,
BUT BC STILL WORST OF ANY PROVINCE**

British Columbia's child poverty rate fell significantly in 2007 -- still the worst of any province, Statistics Canada reported Wednesday.

An analysis of the latest figures by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, showed a drop in the BC child poverty rate from 16.5 percent in 2006 to 13 percent in 2007. The number of poor BC children dropped from 137,000 in 2006 to 108,000 in 2007.

The rate in 2007 was the lowest for the province since 1991.

Even with the latest drop, BC has had the worst child poverty record of any province for six consecutive years from 2002 through 2007. The BC rate remained noticeably higher than the national child poverty rate of 9.5 percent in 2007.

"The good news is we're pleased to see fewer children living in poverty; the bad news is these figures are from 2007, when the economy was still booming," said Julie Norton, Provincial Chairperson of First Call. "People are losing their jobs because of the recession, and we're certain to see many more poor families as a result."

All the current economic indicators bode poorly for BC and other provinces. The latest figures from Statistics Canada released in recent weeks showed unemployment in BC up 68 percent over the past year. The number of welfare cases where the adults are considered able to work rose by nearly 50 percent, personal bankruptcies were up 78 percent, and regular Employment Insurance beneficiaries were up 114 percent.

The poverty rate statistics from Ottawa are based on the low income cut-offs of Statistics Canada using family income after government benefits are received and after federal and provincial income taxes are paid. The poverty line for a family of four living in a large city in 2007 was \$33,946.

The poverty rate for BC children living in two-parent families dropped from 10.8 percent in 2006 to 7 percent in 2007. The rate for children living in families headed by lone-parent females fell from 42.8 percent to 37.4 percent. "A 5.4% decrease for single mothers is notable, however, a rate of over one in three is completely unacceptable for a province that is supposed to be the best place to live," said Ms. Norton.

For all persons, including family members and individuals of all ages, the poverty rate in British Columbia fell from 13 percent in 2006 to 11.1 percent in 2007 (from 546,000 people in 2006 to 474,000 in 2007). The overall poverty rate was also the worst of any province.

First Call is a coalition of provincial, regional and local organizations, communities and individuals who believe that children and youth should have “first call” on the resources of government and the community. Child poverty has been a continuing concern because it affects the health and well-being of children both in the short term and the long term.

First Call has been pushing the BC government to enact legislated requirements to cut child poverty in half by 2017. Its detailed recommendations include a higher minimum wage, reasonable rates of social assistance, high-quality and accessible child care, and more social housing. At the federal level, First Call urges an increase in the Canada Child Tax Benefit and changes in Employment Insurance to make sure most workers will get benefits if they lose their jobs.

Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario all have legislation committing them to fighting poverty. Several other provinces are considering similar moves.

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(Editor’s Note: Statistics Canada also made available Wednesday poverty statistics based on its low income cut-offs before income taxes. The child poverty rate in BC dropped from 22.3 percent in 2006 to 18.8 percent in 2007, and the number of poor children was down from 186,000 in 2006 to 156,000 in 2007.)

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact the First Call office in Vancouver at 604-873-8437:

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