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**TWENTY YEARS LATER – A SECOND LOOK
COULD YOU RAISE YOUR FAMILY ON A WELFARE INCOME?**

Think about the income of \$23,766 a year that was provided for a BC family of two parents and two children on welfare.

That's very little to pay for the necessities of life in one of Canada's most expensive places to live. There's the cost of apartments, with the rental market in greater Vancouver very tight. There's food and clothing, of course.

And then there are all those other items that usually get left off the list of necessities, but really belong on the list. The items include transportation or monthly transit passes, the occasional piece of furniture, out-of-pocket child care expenses, and a bit of family recreation. Also on the list are basic telephone service, school supplies, light bulbs, dish and laundry detergent, all-purpose cleaner, haircuts, shaving supplies, over-the-counter medication, toothpaste and tooth brushes, bar soap, toilet paper, and many other items too numerous to mention.

Could you buy all these things for your family for \$23,766? Well, that was the purchasing power of a BC welfare income way back in 1994, according to the National Council of Welfare.

Now cut the amount by 12 percent to \$21,016. That was the amount paid in 2008 for a family of two adults and two children.

The reductions in welfare incomes took place year after year in BC under both the previous New Democratic Party government and the current BC Liberal government. The Liberals finally raised rates in 2007, but families were still worse off than they were in 1994. BC welfare rates for families didn't go up in 2008 or 2009.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition believes low welfare rates are a significant threat to the health and well-being of the more than 35,000 children living in families on welfare in BC. As documented in [*The Cost of Eating in BC 2009*](#) report by the Dietitians of Canada, BC Region, and noted in recent reports by BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, welfare incomes are too low to allow families to afford healthy food and suitable housing.

The next BC budget comes down on March 2, and two main improvements in welfare rates urgently need to be announced by the Minister of Finance.



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The first improvement is a substantial increase in welfare rates, effective in April. The new rates should be based on the cost of the necessities of life, not a number pulled out of a hat.

The second improvement would be legislation to index welfare rates to the cost of living every January 1. Welfare rates last went up in BC on March 28, 2007. Since that date, the federal government has used indexing to make three annual increases in Canada Pension Plan benefits.

Many other changes in welfare also need to be made, but a rate increase and annual indexing would be two excellent places to start.

First Call is calling upon all those who believe a welfare income of \$21,016 is too low for a family of four, and who believe that the BC government has an obligation to support all residents of the province in need, to contact their MLAs as soon as possible to make these two recommendations for action.

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Twenty Years Later – A Second Look is a series of articles on child poverty written by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. See our latest child poverty report card at www.firstcallbc.org.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact First Call at 604-873-8437.