



202-1193 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC V5V 3C9  
Tel: 604.873.8437 ▪ Toll free: 1.800.307.1212 ▪ Fax: 604.874.9898  
info@firstcallbc.org ▪ www.firstcallbc.org

December 8, 2009

Honourable Mary Polak  
Minister of Children and Family Development  
Government of British Columbia  
Room 306, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 9E9

Dear Minister Polak:

Thank you for meeting with the representatives of the First Call Early Childhood Development Roundtable on October 29, 2009.

Through the meeting we learned of your enthusiastic belief that your government is moving in the right direction with respect to supports and services for young children. While these are tough times financially for the province and there have been funding cuts, you feel confident these cuts and recent policy changes do not affect direct service.

This point of view differs from the perspective that we were asked to bring to you from the ECD Roundtable. Members emphasized that “children are only young once” and due to government’s actions or inaction, many BC children are missing the supports they need in their most formative years. This has been the case in both good economic times and bad.

The evidence about the importance of the early years is considerable, but under-investment in BC is resulting in high rates of vulnerability, poverty and service fragility. Cuts to services for children and families, already too thinly spread, are not acceptable, and are especially not called for in tough economic times when need increases. We presented you with information from our Roundtable participants about cuts to early childhood services and supports they are seeing in their communities.

Although promised many times, there is no comprehensive ECD plan for BC and moving to a regionalized model for decision making without an overarching plan will result in regional disparity and inequity. StrongStart and all day Kindergarten expansion, while potentially positive, are not enough. BC must do more to support families with young children.

You indicated an early years plan is being circulated for internal government discussion at this time. You let us know that you are still forming your thoughts about the best way for government to support child care.

We told you that the early childhood and family serving sector is apprehensive. They wonder when the next “shoe” will drop, especially in the next budget year. They are very committed to serving the families in their communities but find it difficult to plan for the future in the absence of more stable funding and clarity on government’s long-term priorities. There is a strong desire for improved communications between the sector and your ministry.

With respect to the latter, we invited you to assign someone from your team to attend the occasional Roundtable meeting, perhaps two or three times a year, and you agreed this could be done. Because most participants in the ECD Roundtable are directly connected to the front line, this would provide the opportunity not only for you to bring the Ministry and Government's messages to the sector, but to listen to what is being experienced by front line services. People from around the province are at the Roundtable meeting by virtue of phone hook-up.

We also invited you to attend one of our meetings. As this would be easiest for you to do when the Legislature is not sitting, you may wish to consider joining us at the next meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup>. We hope to hear from you soon in response to both these invitations.

In closing, we welcome the enthusiasm that you bring to your mandate and we hope that our discussions were helpful. We look forward to more in the future.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Montani  
Provincial Coordinator