

Provincial & Regional Partners:

Aboriginal Women's Council BC/Yukon
Adoptive Families Association of BC
Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies
Alternate Shelter Society
Association for Community Education BC
ACT – Autism Community Training Society
BC Aboriginal Childcare Society
BC Assoc. for Child Development & Rehabilitation
BC Association for Community Living
BC Association for Play Therapy
BC Association of Child Care Employers
BC Association of Family Resource Programs
BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs
BC Association of Social Workers
BC Council for Families
BC Crime Prevention Association
BC Early Years Alliance ♦ BC Farm Women's Network
BC Federation of Foster Parents Association
BC Government & Service Employees' Union
BC Institute Against Family Violence
BC Pediatric Society ♦ BC Recreation & Parks Assoc.
BC School Trustees Association
BC Teachers' Federation
BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses
Boys & Girls Clubs of BC
Canadian Association for Young Children
Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division
Canadian Red Cross • Capilano Student Union
Cerebral Palsy Association of BC
Child & Family Counseling Association
Child & Youth Care Association of BC
Child Care Advocacy Forum
Children's & Women's Health Centre of BC
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Council of Parent Participation Preschools BC
Deaf Children's Society of BC
Dietitians of Canada, BC Region
Early Childhood Educators of BC
East Kootenay Childhood Coalition
Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Federated Anti-Poverty Groups
Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks
Federation of Child & Family Services of BC
Fulcrum Project
Infant Development Program of BC
International Dyslexia Association, BC Branch
Justice Institute of BC
Labour Environmental Alliance Society
Learning Disabilities Association of BC
Literacy BC • McCreary Centre Society
MOSAIC • Nisika Community Services
National Council of Jewish Women
Pacific Association of First Nations Women
Pacific Community Resources Society
Pacific Legal Education Association /PARCA
Parent Support Services Society of BC
Penticton & District Community Resources Society
Public Health Association of BC
Self Help Resource Association of BC
Social Planning & Research Council BC
Society for Children & Youth of BC
Society for Public Education of BC
Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents
Sunshine Coast Community Services Society
United Way of the Lower Mainland
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre
Westcoast Family Resources Society
Western Canada Family Child Care Association
Working Group on Poverty
YWCA of Greater Vancouver

Community Coalition Partners: 100 Mile House, Abbotsford, Armstrong, Burnaby, Chilliwack, Delta, Duncan, Fraser North, Golden, Grand Forks, Houston, Kamloops, Kelowna, Langley, Maple Ridge/ Pitt Meadows, Port Alberni, Prince George, Salmon Arm, Smithers, Squamish, Surrey, Terrace, Vancouver, Vancouver Aboriginal Council, Vernon, Victoria, Williams Lake

March 2, 2007

The Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041
Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell,

Recently, both you and Minister of State for Child Care Linda Reid have made statements in the Legislature and in the media that contradict your government's own public reporting on child care. For example, on February 14, 2007 you told the Legislature that "*the province has not reduced resources for child care. In fact, we've expanded subsidies for people for child care.*"¹ However, BC's annual public reports on early childhood development, learning and care (ECDLC)² clearly indicate that your government has cut its own contribution to child care programs, including subsidies for lower and moderate income families, and subsequently used federal transfers to replace these cuts.

Regarding your claim to have expanded subsidies, these same public reports show that **25,082 children under 6** accessed subsidies in 2004/05, the most recent year for which ECDLC reports are available.³ On the other hand, your government's 2007 Budget documents indicate that only **24,000 children of all ages (0-12)** are accessing subsidies this year.⁴

In fact, a review of MCFD service plans over the last three years indicates that the target number of children on subsidies in 2007/08 has declined from 40,000 (2005/06 service plan) to 28,000 (2006/07 service plan) and now 24,480 (2007/08 service plan). Some of these reductions may be attributed to changes in data tracking and/or BC's declining child population. But over the same time period, child poverty has been increasing in BC and now stands at 23.5%, the highest level in the country.

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To this day, BC remains the only province in Canadian history that has ever reduced child care subsidy eligibility levels for lower and moderate-income families. The child care subsidy budget itself highlights how difficult it has been for families and services to recover from those cuts. Even though subsidy eligibility levels have now been restored and are higher than in 2002, BC's subsidy budget is still only at \$126 million annually, virtually the same as the 2001/02 budget of \$125 million. It appears that your government's belated attempt to increase subsidy eligibility levels, without a parallel increase in access to high quality, affordable child care services, has in fact meant *fewer "subsidies for people for child care"*.

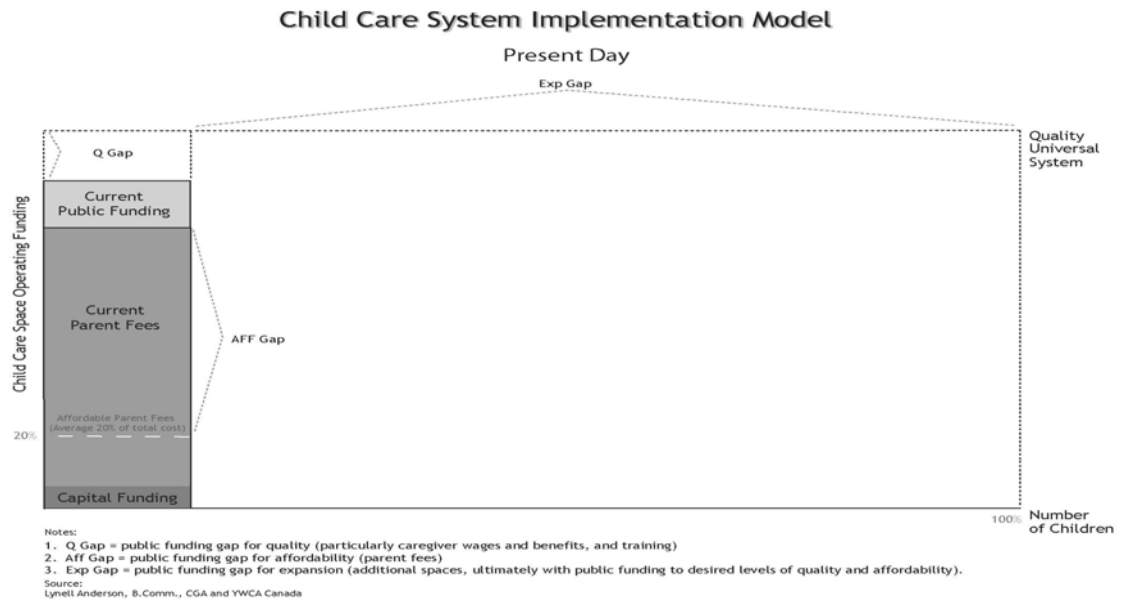
We are writing to you today to express our deep concerns about the state of quality child care in British Columbia overall, and about service access for vulnerable children and families specifically. These concerns are not new but have escalated since January 5, 2007 when Minister Reid issued a letter to child care providers, families and agencies, outlining yet more cuts in child care funding.

Minister Reid has indicated that by preserving the province's current child care funding contribution your government is in fact protecting vulnerable children and those who need additional supports. We urge you to promptly bring forward the evidence that supports this assertion, and to carefully consider all of the evidence that questions it, including:

1. BC research shows that almost 1 in 4 young children from across the socio-economic spectrum are vulnerable, and that vulnerability levels have generally increased in recent years. As the Human Early Learning Partnership states "School failure knows no economic boundaries and the benefits of high quality, preschool-aged child care programs know no economic limits" (August 2006). That's why a publicly funded, universal approach to child care, including both part and full time options, is essential.
2. BC's patchwork of child care services is neither universal, nor is it a system. As the following chart helps to illustrate, less than 15% of children have access to a licensed space, and the spaces that do exist generally cost parents more than post-secondary education - yet child care workers are paid less than similarly-trained professionals in any other sector.

And, this was the situation before your government announced cuts on January 5! Given the increasing fragility of these services, how can you ensure that vulnerable families, and those whose children require additional supports, will be able to find quality child care?

Even if vulnerable families can find quality child care, how can they afford it? Minister Reid has condoned fee increases for all families, including those with lower and moderate incomes.



Moreover, simply maintaining BC's recently-restored child care subsidy levels is only one small part of the answer. International evidence confirms our own experience in BC - when we don't provide direct public funding to important services like education and care, relying instead on parent fees and subsidies, we do not achieve quality, affordability and accessibility. Subsidies do not cover the full cost of care, and despite 20 years of tinkering there are unresolved issues with BC's subsidy system.

Finally, Premier, we are concerned because your government continues to invoke public policy that fragments services for families and communities. Most recently you have:

- Separated early learning (in Education) from child care (in MCFD) – even though research clearly shows that quality child care promotes early learning.
- Invested additional public funds in quality, universal early learning family support programs for at-home parents/caregivers (StrongStart), while simultaneously cutting public investment in child care services for the children of parents who work or study outside the home - even though research clearly shows that children, families, communities and the economy will all benefit if we can move BC's current patchwork of child care services to a quality, universal system.

A closer look at the StrongStart initiative highlights this inequity. StartStart programs receive direct and full public funding so they are free and universal, pay reasonable wages to trained child care workers (Early Childhood Educators), and utilize public facilities (schools) in neighbourhoods, at no cost. These are the very system-building elements that international experience and evidence affirm are also required to build quality child care services. However,

since a parent/caregiver must attend StrongStart programs with the child, these programs do not meet the needs of the majority of BC families who work/study outside the home. In fact, as a result of your child care cuts, working families will have to pay higher child care fees.

In closing, we remind you of the overwhelming body of evidence, some of which has been funded by your government, showing that quality, universal child care services support all children's healthy development and families who are working/studying outside the home. Child care also helps to alleviate the impacts of child poverty. We request that you publicly share the evidence that shows how vulnerable children and families will be protected despite your government's cuts to child care.

Mr. Premier, we are requesting your urgent intervention to reverse the announced cuts to child care in BC. Both our country and our province can afford to invest substantially more in the broad range of services and supports children and families require, including child care.

Sincerely,

Sheila Davidson
Chairperson, Early Childhood Development Roundtable

Copies: All BC MLAs
Lesley du Toit, Deputy Minister
Mary Ellen Turpel Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth.

¹ www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/38th3rd/H70214p.htm Wednesday February 14, Afternoon Sitting Vol 14 #2 p5270

² See, for example, BC's Annual Report on ECD Activities, 2002/03, p. 20 available at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/pdf/eecd_annual02_03_final.pdf

³ BC's Annual Report 2004/05: Activities and Expenditures on Early Childhood Development and Early Learning and Child Care, p. 28. At the time of writing, this report was no longer available on the MCFD web site, and the 2005/06 report had not been published on the web site.

⁴ Adding to these discrepancies, both Minister Reid's January 5 2007 letter to child care providers, families and funded agencies, as well as the January 2007 Factsheet on Child Care and Early Childhood Development (ECD), indicate that the subsidy system currently supports 25,000 families (as opposed to the 24,000 children indicated in the 2007 Budget/Service Plan).