



MAR 13 2009

Ref: 147661

Julie Norton
Provincial Chair
First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
202-1193 Kingsway
Vancouver BC V8V 3C9

The Best Place on Earth

Dear Ms. Norton:

Thank you for your January 9, 2009, letter, to the Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier, regarding the BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) Program and wages in British Columbia. As Minister of Housing and Social Development, I am pleased to respond.

In regards to your comments about minimum wage, over the past several years the proportion of working British Columbians earning minimum wage has dropped. In 2007, only 3.4 percent of working British Columbians were earning the minimum wage or less, many of whom were youth living at home with parents. At the same time, average wages have risen. As of December 2008, the average hourly wage in British Columbia was \$22.04. Government regularly reviews the complex economic and labour market conditions to determine the most appropriate policies to promote a vibrant economy in British Columbia.

Effective April 2007, all income assistance clients became eligible to receive an increase of up to \$50 per month to the maximum shelter portion of their monthly income assistance rates. Rates for families and children increased in amounts ranging from \$97 to well over \$200 per month, depending on the number of children in the family unit. Total rates for employable singles were raised by \$100, or 20 percent, to \$610 per month. This is Canada's fourth highest rate. Many families with children received further increases to their monthly assistance payments as a result of rate harmonization for children in families on income assistance, ensuring all children are treated equally regardless of the assistance category of their parents.

Our new rate structure takes into account all the other provincial and federal tax credits, child supports, family bonuses and numerous programs and supports that low-income families and families on income assistance are eligible for. We believe we have taken a fair, balanced and fiscally responsible approach. Provincial programs and services are regularly reviewed and I assure you that your comments will be taken into consideration.

To help offset the introduction of the carbon tax, low-income British Columbians will receive an annual Climate Action Credit of \$100 per adult and \$30 per child. The credit will be paid quarterly with the federal Goods and Services Tax Credit. In support

Ministry of
Housing and
Social Development

Office of the
Minister

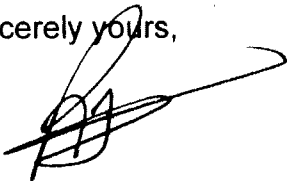
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of this initiative, the government exempts the Climate Action Credit for all clients of income assistance, disability assistance and hardship assistance. Energy and fuel tax rebates are also exempt.

For more information regarding these programs, please access the provincial government's web site at: www.gov.bc.ca/hsd and our Online Resource at: www.gov.bc.ca/bvprd/bc/or/home.do#.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rich Coleman', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rich Coleman
Minister of Housing and Social Development

pc: Premier Gordon Campbell

Honourable Iain Black
Minister of Labour and Citizens' Services