

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

3rd Floor, 210 West Broadway, Vancouver, British Columbia V5Y 3W2
tel: 604.709.5661 www.cccabc.bc.ca fax: 604.709.5662

July 2003

Dear members and supporters

We are sending you a copy of a recent letter from the Coalition to the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development Canada seeking her active involvement in ensuring that the BC government spends federal funds it is receiving through the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care on **regulated child care**.

Our request for federal action is in response to our provincial government's decision to spend 100% of its Year 1 (\$3.3 million) allocation of new Multilateral Framework funds on Supported Child Care which, according to government documents, will now focus on child development rather than child care.

(More information on the province's plans is available in a recently released publication of the Child Care Advocacy Forum called **Anything But Child Care – BC's New ABCs**. The direct link to a downloadable version of this document from the Coalition's website is www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum/pdf/AdvForum_ABCs.pdf and is also included in this package.)

We are asking you to follow up and support our request to Jane Stewart with a letter or email (Stewart.J@parl.gc.ca) of your own. Simply let Minister Stewart know that British Columbians are counting on her to hold our provincial government accountable. Remind her that federal money is OUR money too and needs to be spent to access to quality child care for BC children and families.

In solidarity,

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.

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July 28, 2003

The Honourable Jane Stewart
Minister of Human Resource Development Canada
House of Commons, Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Stewart,

We are writing to seek your commitment to ensuring that BC's share of the transfer funds from the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care are spent in ways that meet the stated objectives of the initiative.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is a voluntary organization of parents, child care providers, community organizations and concerned citizens that advocates for a comprehensive accessible and affordable non-profit child care system in BC and across Canada. We are active partners in efforts to ensure that all levels of government, including the federal government, provide the policy framework and financial resources required to build a child care system that meets the needs of all of Canada's children and families.

We joined with many others in calling on the federal government to negotiate the Agreement on Early Childhood Development (ECD). While we welcomed this initiative as an important first step, regrettably, our initial concerns about the lack of accountability for provincial and territorial expenditures under this Agreement were well founded. Rather than improving the situation, expenditures under this agreement have served to increase the disparity that exists in access to quality child care across the country.

As a result of the failure of the ECD Agreement to improve access to quality child care, our organization actively supported efforts to negotiate a new federal/provincial/territorial arrangement that would provide additional funds designated for regulated child care. While we were dismayed at the inadequate funding levels provided through the resulting Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, we were encouraged by the explicit focus on regulated child care and the priority placed on funding of direct services.

However, recent announcements by the BC provincial government about their allocation plans for the new funds are alarming and require your immediate attention. BC intends to spend its total Year 1 allocation of \$3.3 million on the Supported Child Care (SCC) Program. To date, SCC has supported the inclusion of children with extra support needs in the child care settings chosen by their families which is an essential element of an accessible child care system.

However, there are two serious problems with the BC government's decision:

1. Concurrent with the government's announcement that it will spend all of the 2003/04 Multilateral Framework funds on SCC, they have announced plans to **refocus SCC on child development, rather than on child care**. This reflects an on-going false and dangerous policy separation between child development and child care and, once again, confirms that BC seems prepared to spend federal funds on anything but child care.

2. The BC government is in the midst of a budget cutting agenda that is devastating regulated child care in BC. We estimate that over a 3 year period close to \$50 million will be cut from provincial funding for licensed child care in BC. In this context, rather than using federal funds to supplement existing provincial expenditures, federal funds are being used to alleviate some of the most glaring problems caused by provincial cuts.

Specifically, BC has recently reduced the level of planned provincial funding cuts to the Supported Child Care Program from an initial target of 28% to 11% (approximately \$4 million). Concurrently, they have made a commitment to maintain current levels of services for children and families using the SCC program. Clearly, the \$3.3 million federal transfer is being used to replace withdrawn provincial funding.

Regrettably, in spite of the efforts of advocates and a modest increase in resources from the federal government, the situation for children and families in BC is getting worse, not better.

As the federal minister responsible for the recent federal/provincial/territorial negotiations, we are calling on you to take action to hold the BC government accountable for meeting its obligations under the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care.

Specifically, we are calling on you to:

- Request a public report from the BC government detailing how they will ensure that the new federal funds are spent on regulated child care in light of their stated intention to refocus Supported Child Care on child development rather than on child care.
- Require that provinces and territories use designated federal funds to supplement rather than replace provincial spending on child care.
- Use existing or, if necessary, develop new accountability and compliance mechanisms that require provinces and territories to use designated federal fund to build a publicly funded child care system that is comprehensive; high quality; inclusive; universal; non-profit; affordable and accountable.
- Based on strengthened accountability measures, provide adequate federal funds to build a publicly funded child care system than meets the needs of all of Canada's children.

Families across Canada are looking to you for the leadership required to ensure that the latest intergovernmental commitment is not another failure. We look forward to your speedy response.

Sincerely,

Susan Harney
Chair, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

CC. Premier Gordon Campbell
The Honourable Linda Reid, BC Minister of State for Early Childhood
The Honourable Lynn Stephens, BC Minister of State for Women's Equality
The Honourable Gary Collins, BC Minister of Finance

Summer Update

Here in the middle of a very hot summer it seems appropriate to give you an update of what board members have been working on in the last while.

In early May, we organized a very successful Student Advocacy Forum for ECE students from across the lower mainland and Fraser Valley. The event was well attended and brought many new young advocates to the Coalition.

Coalition board members and supporters made the television and radio news on several channels and stations on May 14th when we staged a peaceful and noisy vigil outside Premier Gordon Campbell's constituency office.

Caregivers from family child care programs and centres, employers, union members and leaders, parents and children, and members of the Senior's Network actively participated with Coalition members. Many drivers passing by gave us the "thumbs up" by honking their horns and heartily waving at our signs and chants!

Later in May, we teamed up with other advocates to present an advocacy workshop at the ECEBC conference, we staffed the CCCABC display at the conference and many of us enjoyed an evening at the Westcoast Child Care Spring Fling. Some of us marched proudly carrying the Coalition banner along with hundreds of others at the Lower Mainland Social Justice Coalition Day of Defiance rally through downtown Vancouver.

In June, we were pleased to provide a guest speaker at the Grassroots Women Child Care Forum highlighting the effects of current government cutback policies.

The new BC representative to the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada with the BC Parent Voices representative, and the outgoing Chair of the CCAAC Council of Child Care Advocates working with Parent Voices, participated in the successful meetings of our sister organization, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. The meetings which focussed on pan-Canadian child care issues and policy directions were held in Ottawa and included parent representatives from BC, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador; other board members and advocates from across Canada; as well as representatives from other sectors.

Coalition board members continue to represent the Coalition at the Advocacy Forum table and to work diligently and cooperatively to move the child care agenda forward with the five other provincial child care organizations. We have a board member from CCCABC at First Call who also chairs First Call's Early Childhood Roundtable.

In July we had a guest spot on CKNW radio station to highlight the crisis in child care and take calls from listeners.

Also this month, our consultant working with the Advocacy Forum and CCCABC made a well-received presentation to Vancouver City Council regarding the crisis in child care centres. She spoke in support of Vancouver City Council increasing city child care grants and subsidizing Vancouver spaces in lower income communities; lobbying the provincial government to restore the funding to child care, and lobbying the federal government to ensure

that BC spends its federal dollars in accordance with the Multilateral Framework Agreement. City Council unanimously approved the proposal.

The Coalition board is working on plans to strengthen our collaborative working relationships with Labour and Women's groups. We are planning working sessions in the fall and winter that will allow us to bring together representatives from these groups as we work to highlight the child care issues in preparation for the next elections.

In the fall, the Coalition will present a brief to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance. If you are interested in submitting a written brief,

making a presentation to this committee, or adding your name or your organization's name to the BC Parent Voices brief, let us know - you can check out details and the sample brief at: http://www.childcare.ca/parent_voices/main-EN.html.

In the meantime you can be sure that all of us involved with the Coalition seize every opportunity (almost 24/7) to promote advocacy. We work to move the child care agenda forward, and to boldly speak out with you in our collective efforts to hold our politicians to account on behalf of child care advocacy for BC's children and families.

Thank you.

Child Care Advocacy Forum

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Phone: (604) 515-6257
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Participating Organizations:

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Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC

Early Childhood
Educators of BC

School Age Child Care
Association

Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre

Western Canada Family
Child Care Association
of BC

Funding and Support provided by:

Status of Women Canada
- BC/Yukon Region
through Coalition of Child
Care Advocates of BC



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Anything But Child Care BC's New ABC's June 2003

The government of BC has once again demonstrated its complete lack of commitment to a quality, inclusive child care system that meets the needs of **all** children and their families. The latest evidence is found in the mixed messages government is sending about its decision to reduce budget cuts in the Ministry to Children and Family Development (MCFD) from 23% to 11%.

On the one hand, government promises that programs and initiatives supporting early childhood development will be exempt from budget cuts. Their investments in MCFD's Supported Child Care (SCC) Program, which provides for the inclusion of 6000 children in regulated child care and pre-school settings, are protected with no reduction in funding or service.

Recent government documents further indicate that \$3.3 million for SCC will come from BC's share of new federal funding negotiated under the recent provincial/ territorial/ federal agreement on "Early Learning and Child Care".

Given the Avocacy Forum's long standing position supporting a regulated child care system that is fully inclusive and meets the needs of every child - regardless of their ability, language, culture, family income and status or other differences – one might expect us to applaud MCFD's decision.

Regrettably, here is why we can't:

- The very documents that outline the BC government's decision to use new federal child care dollars for SCC, also announce that SCC will now "**focus on child development rather than childcare**".
- MCFD's announcement comes on the heels of provincial budget cuts that continue to devastate child care in BC. Over a 3 year period, the province is cutting close to \$50 million from its spending on regulated child care. All over BC, fewer families can afford regulated care, caregiver wages are dropping, and licensed child care programs are closing.

➤ On top of cuts to its own funding for child care, BC refuses to spend federal 'early childhood' funds that it receives through two separate provincial/territorial/federal agreements on regulated child care.

- The first source of federal funds is the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECD). Under this agreement, BC is receiving \$291 million over 5 years (2000/01 - 2004/05).
- The province has only reported on how it spent the first year's ECD allocation of \$39.9 million. Despite wide spread community consensus that 2/3 of these funds should go to child care, BC only spent \$6 million on child care. Shockingly, the government underspent its total ECD budget that year by \$6 million and has not yet said how it is spending the \$119.6 that it received under this agreement in years 2 and 3.
- The second source of federal funds comes through the recently negotiated Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. This new federal/provincial/territorial agreement grew out of the failure of the ECD agreement to improve child care in many parts of Canada, including BC. As a result, advocates convinced the federal government to commit new funds over and above the ECD budget for regulated child care.
- Under this new agreement, BC will receive an additional \$121.6 million over 5 years starting with this year's installment of \$3.3 million.
- BC, along with the other provinces and territories who signed on, agreed to "further invest in provincially/territorially **regulated early learning and child care programs** for children under six (which) ... meet quality standards that are established and monitored by provincial/territorial governments".
- The Agreement also says that the federal funding initiatives "will **primarily provide direct care and early learning** for children in settings such as **child care centres, family child care homes, preschools, and nursery schools**. Types of investments could include capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral".

Yet, in spite of having signed this agreement, BC plans to spend these dollars on its refocused SCC program that will no longer focus on child care!

The actions of the province speak louder than their words. Its actions tell us that it will continue to:

- Ignore the needs of close to 389,000 BC children under the age of 12 whose mothers are in the paid labour force.
- Insist on making a false and dangerous separation between childhood development and regulated child care.
- Implement an ABC policy of "Anything But Child Care" that will only lead to reduced access to licensed child care for children with extra support needs, especially for those whose parents are in the paid labour force.

Let **US** be clear where we stand:

- We **oppose cuts in services** for children, youth and their families. An 11% cut to MCFD is not ok, especially when some services are 'protected' at the expense of others. **All** BC children are entitled to have their needs met.
- We **fully support an inclusive child care system** that provides all children access to a full range of quality, licensed child care programs. Successful inclusion depends on a strong 'typical', regulated child care system that is complemented and supplemented by dedicated resources through Supported Child Care programs for those with additional needs. We will continue to work towards this vision.
- We **respect the families and services providers in the community living sector** who are tireless and effective advocates for their children and will continue to work with them to build communities that nurture every child.

We continue to call on the provincial government to:

1. Direct the new federal funds to regulated child care as stipulated in the Multilateral Framework.
2. Restore provincial funding for regulated child care and early learning programs.
3. Use federal dollars to complement, not replace, provincial spending on regulated child care and early learning programs.
4. Spend a fair share of BC's Early Childhood Development Agreement funds on regulated child care – a cornerstone of a comprehensive early childhood strategy.

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Publicly Funded Child Care What Does It Mean?

The Advocacy Forum is committed to working for a child care system in BC that entitles all children access to quality child care and early childhood programs, regardless of their families' economic or employment status.

Such a system requires public policies and budgets that move child care from a user fee system – which it is now - to one primarily funded through the tax system like so many other services in our communities.

Public parks, libraries, firehalls, schools, hospitals, and streets are examples of facilities and services that are paid for through the tax system. These services are there for anyone in the community who wants or needs to use them. It's not that they are 'free services'. Funding for their operating budgets primarily comes from one or more levels of government.

Public libraries are a good example. It costs money to build, stock and run libraries. As a society, we have decided that it makes sense to pool our money, through the tax system, so that everyone can use them. People can still go to a bookstore to buy books – but everyone, regardless of their income, can borrow books from the public library.

In some cases, publicly funded services have a small fee attached. Pay parking at a public beach is one example. Public funding means that the beach will still be there even if everyone comes by foot, bike or bus.

This is NOT the approach we use to fund child care. That's not to say that there is no public funding of child care. The child care subsidy program and the child care operating fund are funded through the taxes we pay to the province and anyone who uses these programs is receiving public funds.

The problem is that current public funding only covers a small part of the cost of child care. Unlike parks or libraries, child care is primarily funded by parent fees. In BC, public funding for child care totals around \$200 million a year. BC parents pay more than \$1.3 BILLION each year from their own pockets.

This user-fee system is not working! Children from middle and lower income families cannot access quality child care programs because their families cannot afford to pay costly fees. Child care can actually cost parents more than their child's university education later on, but it comes at a time when family earning power is often less. The needs of too many young children and their families go unmet because of a lack of public funding for child care.

Our goal is to turn the tables so that most of the cost of child care comes from public funding with a small portion coming from parent fees. The child care system would be stable and accessible. Everyone who pays taxes would be supporting the child care system because, like parks and schools, these services benefit us all. Quality child care offers children a good start in life – and that's good for everyone!

In a nutshell, this is what we mean by publicly funded child care.