

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

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Submission to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

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INTRODUCTION:

We'd like to start by reminding the Committee about a few key events and promises made by the BC government during 2005/2006.

In the **Speech from the Throne on September 12, 2005**, government set out Five Great Goals for British Columbia. The number 1 goal statement articulated that the BC government intended:

"To make BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent."

Shortly after, on **Sept 29, 2005**, upon the signing of the federal provincial **early learning and child care agreements** for children under 6 years of age, Premier Campbell sated,

"We want to ensure that B.C. families have access to a sustainable, flexible and affordable early learning and child care system that will ensure B.C. children get the support they need to thrive and succeed."

And then, a long overdue **Summary of Community Consultations by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Education** was released on **June 9, 2006**.

This summary of consultations conducted during the fall and winter of 2005/06 reported that:

In order to realize their goals, the government was *"developing a plan to ensure that BC's children have the best possible future – beginning with an emphasis on strengthening support for children aged birth – 6 (the early years) in three key areas:*

- healthy development*
- education, learning and literacy, and*
- child care. "*

We were informed by the summary that:

*“The **government remains committed** to its vision to provide access to quality early learning and child care in all BC communities.”*

*“There was support for **an accessible, affordable, high-quality system of early learning and child care in BC**”.*

*“**Child care was identified as a primary need of working families**, and limited access to quality child care was cited as a key barrier, especially among vulnerable populations and in remote communities. **There was general agreement that access to quality child care must be a priority**”.*

Participants agreed *“the ultimate goal should be that all children be supported in a safe, stimulating environment that promotes healthy growth, learning and development. These were seen as **hallmarks of quality**, which many linked directly to the education, skills and abilities of caregivers.”*

There is a need for increased *“**investments in human resource development in child care and early childhood education so that wages, working conditions and professional development opportunities in these sectors are sufficient to recruit and retain skilled staff**”.*

*“**Child care operating funding was identified as a top priority** – it contributes to sustainability by ensuring sufficient financial support to child care providers and assists with the costs of providing quality child care.”*

Participants identified *“**the need for strong accountability** - at both the community and provincial levels – to track results, measure progress and provide evidence that British Columbians are benefiting from any investments in these areas.”*

*“Communities want better support to ensure that programs and services are **sustainable for the long term and able to accommodate emerging needs**.”*

After the last Throne Speech and Provincial Budget

On Feb 14 th after the provincial Throne Speech, it became apparent for many families, child care managers and workers that the BC government had suddenly and shockingly become silent on next steps for child care.

It was clear that while the Premier had signed a child care agreement with the federal government and had made a public commitment to improve access to quality child care in BC, six months later, child care had fallen off the BC government agenda.

The reality was that:

- over their first term in office, this BC government cut \$40 million from its own annual spending on child care and was not making any efforts to restore this funding cut;

- all of the increases in child care spending, including increases to the child care subsidy program, were paid for with federal funds;
- while the subsequent BC budget included federal transfers there has been no explanation of how the BC government plans to replace the federal transfers they were counting on for the next 3 years; and

Minister Reid, September 12, 2006

On September 12, 2006, Minister Linda Reid circulated a letter to parents and child care providers as well as an Information Bulletin [on the government web site]. She told parents and child care providers that:

“Despite the cancellation of the federal early learning and child care agreement, which represents a loss of \$455 million in federal funding, this letter is to also reassure parents and child-care providers that, in addition to maintaining the increases to subsidy over the long term, the Province will endeavour to maintain all other child-care services to the end of the current school year.”

With no further explanations, families and child care providers are far from reassured!

- **What about the continuation of the Child Care Operating Funding [CCOF]?**
- **What about implementation of the points raised and reported in the MCFD and Min of Ed. community consultations?**
- **And what is BC’s plan for sustaining and increasing funding after the “current school year”?**

The COMMUNITY REALITY AND PRIORITIES HAVE NOT CHANGED

Ipsos Reid conducted a poll in April that “showed an overwhelming 90 percent of British Columbians, whether they personally need it or not, support child care for families who do”. A majority of British Columbians—79% —said that after cutting \$40 million in child care funding over the past three years, it’s time the provincial government invested more in the children of working families. [BCGEU <http://www.bcgeu.ca/3545>]

The evidence of why BC needs to increase its spending and commitment on regulated child care remains strong!

In addition to what we have known for years:

“For the Record: The Latest Facts on Current Issues in BC” -- Key facts about Women [from the BC government web site] informs us that:

1. More women are working than ever before: more than 1.021 million as of January 2006.

2. 84.4 % of female job creation since December 2001 has been full-time.
3. B.C. has the fastest growth in female small business ownership among all Canadian provinces (*CIBC World Markets, "Women Entrepreneurs: Leading the Charge" – 28 June 2005*).

A snapshot of Mothers in the BC Labour Force reminds us that:

- 86% of mothers are back in the workforce within a year of having given birth and their children are in some form of non-parental care.
- In 2003 there were 357,900 BC mothers of children from infants to 12 years in the paid labour force. Of these 357,900 children:
 - 70,400 were from birth to 2 years of age
 - 78,000 were from 3-5 years of age and
 - 209,500 were from 6-12 years of age
- Workforce participation of BC mothers by age of youngest child:
 - 0 to 2 years - - 70,100; 67.4 %
 - 3to 5 years - - 56,000; 73.5%
 - 6 to 15 years - - 175,100; 78.7%
- Economists estimate that if all mothers with children under the age of 6 were to leave the labour force, the cost to the Canadian economy would be about \$83 billion per year.

AND yet, statistics about access to a regulated child care space in BC point out that:

- The percentage of children for whom there is a regulated child care space in our province is merely 13.7%.

Clearly far from achieving Premier Campbell's Sept 2005 commitment to;
"ensure that B.C. families have access to a sustainable, flexible and affordable early learning and child care system that will ensure B.C. children get the support they need to thrive and succeed."

RECOMMENDATIONS – PRIORITIES AND CHOICES

Our CCCABC vision and child care plan
<http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/res/pdf/cccabccplan.pdf>
is substantiated by credible international and Canadian research evidence that demonstrates that:

- 1. "the early years are critical in the development of intelligence, personality and social behavior and that there are long term effects associated with a variety of early intervention programs" AND**

2. a universal approach to quality regulated child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it:

- **supports families and their workforce participation,**
- **reduces child poverty,**
- **advances women's equality,**
- **deepens social inclusion and**
- **builds a competitive knowledge-based economy.**

Investing in a child care system through the tax system:

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC believes that we need to build a quality publicly funded, community-delivered child care system in Canada. We appreciate that it makes sense to pay for things collectively rather than individually. We think it makes sense to invest in a child care system through the tax system because:

- Families are usually at their lowest earning power when their children are young. When they most need child care, they are least likely to be able to afford it.
- Children's development is time sensitive and can't wait until their families can afford quality care.
- The benefits of investing in child care now outweigh the costs and will lead to future increased tax revenues.
- The earlier we invest in our children, the longer we all reap the benefits through economic contributions, a civil society and a healthier citizenry.

We feel many BC'ers and Canadians have been encouraged to lose sight of the connection between the taxes we pay, government surpluses and the vital services we receive.

We have learned first hand that corporate and big tax cuts mean service cuts and increased user fees which impact negatively on low and moderate income families.

The Finance Minister has informed the public that BC surpluses and increased revenues are available.

Investing in a quality system of regulated child care services for children from birth to 12 years of age that is community delivered will *go a long way to meeting* many goals and promises that BC has made including:

- *making "BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent."*

- *ensuring Premier Campbell acts on his promises that "B.C. families have access to a sustainable, flexible and affordable early learning and child care system that will ensure B.C. children get the support they need to thrive and succeed."*

We call on the Finance Committee to recommend that the BC government fulfill it's child care agreement and promises to the people of BC.

Budget 2007/08 priorities should truly reflect a REAL budget that concentrates on children AND access to quality, regulated and affordable child care by:

- 1. allocating resources to shift the cost of child care, for children from birth to 12 years, from user fees to public funding.**
- 2. using the provincial surpluses to restore the \$40 million cut from BC's own spending on child care since 2001/02.**
- 3. increasing spending on the Child Care Operating Funding (CCOF) for regulated child care.**
- 4. ensuring that every aspect of the BC child care plan for children from birth to 12 years and every dollar of spending on child care improves and sustains quality, licensed, child care services.**

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is a voluntary, non-profit organization of parents, child care workers, interested citizens and community organizations.