

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

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Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Pre-Budget Consultation
Office of the Clerk of Committees
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

September 20, 2002

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. (CCCABC) is pleased to submit this written brief to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for its pre-budget discussions.

Sincerely,

Sharon Gregson, Director
On Behalf of the Board of Directors
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.

**2002 Pre Budget Consultation
to the Select Standing Committee on Finance
September, 2002**

**Submitted by
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.**
3 rd floor, 210 West Broadway,
Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 3W2

Introduction

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

We support:

- The development of a comprehensive, accessible and affordable non-profit child care system in B.C. and across Canada.
- The right of every child and family to quality child care in their community.
- A range of inclusive child care choices including licensed, regulated family and centre-based care.
- Stable, adequate government funding to sustain quality child care programs.
- Child care worker's rights to wages and working conditions which reflect the level of training, responsibility and value of work performed.

We are pleased to submit this written response to the pre budget discussions of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. We understand from the pre consultation documents prepared by your government that this committee's work will focus on deficits, fiscal targets and balanced budgets. But, through your deliberations, we strongly urge you to balance financial statements with the day-to-day realities and needs of BC families and children.

What do British Columbians already know?

- adequate income and a healthy start in life have positive long term impacts and promote the healthy growth and development of our community's children;
- access to high quality child care would be a key component of an effective anti-poverty strategy;
- while at least 65% of all children have mothers who are in the paid labour force, only 10% of all children have access to regulated child care which meets minimum regulatory standards regarding the safety and health of our children;

- the current cost of regulated child care is unaffordable for the majority of families and the very children who could most benefit from access to enriched experiences are least likely to receive them (particularly for infant and toddler care);
- without adequate government support, the delivery of child care is rapidly becoming more fragmented and fragile, and unable to meet the varied needs of families and communities;
- tax cuts do not create child care spaces;
- effective child care services that meet needs of families, communities and society:
 - support adults in their caregiving roles;
 - enable adults to participate in the labour force, educational and training programs; and
 - contribute to women's capacity for a more equitable role in society.

What are British Columbians saying?

Polls have informed us that:

- a significant majority, 90% of Canadians, believe that high quality child care is important to ensure Canada's social and economic well-being;
- a significant majority, 81% of Canadians, believe that governments should develop a plan for a comprehensive child care system.

Recommendations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services:

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. strongly urges the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government relations to:

1. Reverse the cuts this government has made to child care subsidy:

In just four short months, 10,500 families in BC have been negatively impacted by the reduction in the allowable income threshold and the eligibility criteria changes which took effect in April 2002. The Ministry of Human Resources projects it will reduce its spending on child care subsidies by about \$26 million per year. Already with these changes:

- * Approximately 9,000 families receive less child care subsidy
- * Another 1,500 families no longer receive any child care subsidy at all

These cuts mean that even more families are now unable to afford regulated child care. Without access to affordable child care some parents/guardians will be forced to drop out of the workforce, forced to discontinue their studies/training programs, and many low /moderate income families with an at-home parent are unable to enroll their children in a pre school program.

It must be added, that we know low-income subsidies are not the way to “fix” child care and they never have been. Such subsidies do not improve quality, create more spaces to meet a community’s real needs, or support infra-structure. But, they are vitally necessary to the parents depending on them in the short term until BC has a truly comprehensive, publicly funded child care system.

2. Reverse the decisions to de-fund the child care infrastructure:

Province-wide the Child Care Resource and Referral programs, One-Stop Access sites, and Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre have been notified that they will no longer receive provincial funding after March 31, 2004. Without these supports, parents will not have community based opportunities to learn about child care options; to access information about choosing child care, fees and regulated child care services in their community. Caregivers will lose the important opportunities for community networking and service planning, training and sharing equipment and resources. These services are vital to supporting and enhancing quality child care in communities.

The provincial services of Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre provide invaluable services to families, students, researchers and government staff, child care providers and others across this province. This includes, but is not limited to: access to current information and expertise in a number of key areas; to resources and training opportunities; to telephone consultation; and to the most comprehensive child care collection of books/articles in B.C. These are invaluable community and provincial services that must continue to receive adequate provincial funding.

3. Adequately fund the new child care operating grant as your critical first step to building and funding a sustainable, child care system in B.C.:

We know that Minister Stephens plans to introduce a child care operating grant in April, 2003. The Minister is applauded for her efforts, however advocates want to send a strong message that spreading the existing dollars more thinly will in fact make things worse, and will not take us forward to achieving a comprehensive, quality child care system in B.C.

This operating grant must be tied to increased affordability or the cost of quality care will remain out of the hand of the majority of BC families. It must be linked with decent wages and benefits for child care workers. And the reporting system must ensure public accountability for all government funds.

4. Ensure spending priorities for the Early Childhood Development Initiative, a Federal program, meet recent promises:

It is our understanding that Minister Reid recently agreed to commit 50% of the federal funds from the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) under the SUFA (Social Union Framework Agreement). This money is intended to be spent in addition to provincial funds being invested into child care – not instead of provincial dollars. It is imperative to remember that child care is the cornerstone of an early childhood system and supporting and improving regulated child care is one of the four key areas outlined in the Agreement signed by BC and the other provinces.

What is required now?

Like others, we are calling on our provincial government to make a substantial investment and commit to a 5-year action plan with targets and timelines to develop a comprehensive child care system that meets the needs of families in every community in BC.

Make a public investment in funding high quality child care. This will not only benefit parents and children; society gains as well. The public benefits from increased workforce participation and increased attachment to the labour force with subsequent higher tax revenue for government. Parents can only enter the workforce IF they have affordable, quality child care services available to them.

Minister Reid’s ministry has paid for and received extensive reports from Dr. Clyde Hertzman that clearly demonstrate how all children benefit from access to quality early childhood education and care. The Vancouver Board of Trade recommends that investment in early child development be a spending priority.

Quality child care means regulated child care and it should be the right of every family in BC to be able to access quality child care services just as they should be able to access health care and education in this province.

Sources:

- The Early Years Study: Reversing the Brain Drain, Dr. F. Mustard and Hon. M.N. McCain, 1998
- Partners in Quality, Canadian Child Care Federation, 1999
- Angus Reid, 1999
- Vancouver Board of Trade 1999