

The members of the BC Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

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Submitted by Sharon Gregson and Dianne Goldberg on behalf of BC Parent Voices

Introduction

We are parent voices from across BC who are concerned about our provincial government's budget cuts and policy changes in child care. We see first hand how these decisions are affecting BC's children, families, communities and the economy.

In the Budget for 2003, the BC government says that its goal is "a sustainable child care system that meets the needs of families". And throughout this last year, **you told us** that: BC needs a long term "new strategic plan to address child care in a comprehensive, coordinated fashion"; that "low income families are better able to meet the cost of child care"; and that "government is enabled to make informed decisions on issues that affect child care services."

[Source: http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/sp2003/caws/caws_child_link1.htm]

But this is our reality – a snapshot of child care for children and families in BC:

- a significant majority of BC's children whose mothers are in the paid labour force do **not** have access to a licensed child care space. Obviously there are too few licensed spaces to meet the needs of families.
- our provincial government's spending on licensed child care over three years and across various ministries will be reduced by approximately \$50 million.
- government budget decisions to spend less are making it 100% impossible to build a high quality sustainable child care system that meets the needs of families.
- with less government funding, more families are experiencing increased financial stress because more of a family's monthly earnings are required to pay for child care.
- despite your promises to protect services for children with special needs, recent changes mean that fewer families are able to afford access to inclusive, licensed child care programs - pre schools and full-day child care programs. A 'stay at home parent' is no longer eligible for the Special Needs Supplement.
- despite your promises of "targeting support to families who need it most", low income earners with an 'at home parent' are now unable to access any child care subsidy – their option to choose to use licensed child care programs e.g., pre school, is now eliminated.

Our family was looking for infant child care and we had our name on the infant centre waitlist in our community. After several months, they let us know there was a vacancy for a September 2003 start. But I was still on maternity leave and at first did not plan to go back to work until January, 2004. We took the space for September, because if we didn't, we knew from a lot of our friends and work colleagues that there are long waitlists. There is a real shortage of licensed infant and toddler spaces and we definitely wanted a licensed space in a child care centre. The fees for infant care are so expensive, but we are really pleased with the quality of the care – the child care staff are trained and qualified. We are lucky we can afford it. We are also lucky that we put our names on the wait list in time to get offered a space. Several of our friends are still waiting for a space and they cannot go back to work until they get the kind of care they want for their children.

Recommendations for Budget 2004

“What children experience in the first five years of life stays with them forever. Much of what they will achieve physically, intellectually and socially in later life is determined during this time.”

[Source: Achieve BC – BC Government web site]

We urge you to recommend that spending on licensed, quality child care become a provincial budget priority.

1. Reverse the current and planned child care funding cuts, and restore provincial child care funding across various ministries to 2000/01 levels.
2. Live up to your promises to develop a “sustainable child care system that meets the needs of families”.
3. Stop all plans to use the federal funding to replace provincial budget cuts. Start using a fair share of the federal ECDI funding for regulated child care and use all of the federal Multilateral Framework Agreement funding as it is intended “to further invest in provincially/territorially regulated early learning and child care programs for children under six”. Use the federal dollars PLUS provincial dollars, and begin to build an affordable, quality, inclusive and regulated child care system in BC.

BC can afford to give our children the best start!

I am a single young parent with a 4 year old in a 3-5 daycare. My gross income is \$24,300 a year. Because of cuts, I don't get as much subsidy as I used to and now I have to pay an additional \$1,534 a year for child care. I cannot afford it.

We have 2 children, a 3 year old and 6 month old. My husband got laid off and is waiting for his E.I and I am on maternity E.I.B. and receive about \$800/month. We want to send our 3 year old to preschool, which costs \$200/month. Because I am at home now we do not qualify for subsidy anymore. The subsidy worker told us that before the rules changed, we would have qualified for \$107/month. It would be difficult, but we would have done something to make it work because we know it is important for our child's development. But without subsidy, we cannot afford pre school. She will miss out.

My husband is out of work and so he left the city to try to find a job. I have to return to work to help support our family. I found out that licensed infant care is around \$1,000/mth, and it would be \$550/mth for our 4 year old. I applied for subsidy but with a net income of \$2,500/mth, I can only receive \$409/mth, that would leave me with a monthly child care bill of around \$1,150/mth (\$13,800 a year)! With rent of \$900/mth, it would leave me with about \$450/mth to live on. I had to try to find “cheaper” child care. A friend told me about an older lady down the street. Now she looks after my children for \$1000/mth, but she wants it in cash only. That means I cannot claim it on income tax. And my daughter has no playmates her own age. It's not a licensed child care – the lady has no liability insurance, no training, and no criminal record check. I am really worried cause when this woman gets frustrated she often puts my 4 year old in front of the television.

You could call us middle income earners – we have two salaries. The school age program is full and has long waiting lists. We have been on their wait list for 6 months. But still there are no vacancies. And so now our two children, 8 and 11 years old, are on their own at home until we get home from work.

Last year we had 3 year olds with special needs in our inclusive pre school. We had extra staffing from Supported Child Care (SCC) and the children benefited from all of the early learning opportunities with other children and with trained child care staff. These children were registered for our 4 year old program in September. But with the recent changes in July, the children cannot attend anymore because their families cannot afford the pre school fees. Now to get the Special Needs Supplement, even if you are a low income family, the parents(s) have to be working or in school and if you are a 'stay at home parent' you are no longer eligible to receive the Supplement or the Child Care Subsidy. Our community is hurting – we have a lot of unemployed parents and all of these families are left with no choices when it comes to pre school or any other licensed child care programs. These cuts and changes are really hurting the children, our pre school and our community.