

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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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