

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

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January 7, 2003

Honourable Lynn Stephens
Minister of State for Women's Equality
Room 323
Parliament Buildings
PO Box 9056 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Stephens,

We are writing to share our concerns and questions about a number of statements that you made on the Bill Good radio program on Dec. 12, 2002.

Specifically:

1. Your statement that cuts to the child care subsidy program have affected 'higher income earners' is misleading at best. Figures from the Ministry of Human Resources indicate that under the new rules, a single parent with one four year old child in group care will only receive the maximum subsidy rate if her gross annual income is \$16,836 or less. And, subsidy reductions kick in once a single parent with two children in family care earns a gross annual income of \$20,184. By any measure, these are hardly 'high income' earners and your suggestion to the contrary shows a profound lack of understanding of the realities facing working poor families.
2. Your statement that if parents can't afford quality care, there are other arrangements they can make indicates a troubling disregard for the indisputable body of research that proves the relationship between quality child care and healthy childhood development. Are you suggesting that 'quality child care' is a privilege for those who can afford it, while others will have to make do with something less than quality care? And, on behalf of families across BC who cannot access quality care, we ask you to publicly document the 'other arrangements' that are available to them.
3. Similarly, your statements about reduced wages for child care providers indicate a lack of understanding of the relationship between adequate wages and the quality of care. While some of your specific references to the Munroe Agreement were inaccurate, we are more concerned about your implication that the current average wage of \$12 -\$13 an hour for child care providers is adequate. Even the Ministry of Human Resources recognizes that a parent who earns a gross hourly wages in this range needs a subsidy to afford child care for her own children.
4. Most puzzling to us were your statements that your government plans to "restructure Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) Programs". While we fully agree that CCRRs play an important role in supporting the quality of care, the reality is that your Ministry plans to cut all provincial funding for these programs as of April 1, 2004. We would be delighted to hear that you have

changed your mind, but to suggest publicly that the elimination of Child Care Resource and Referral Programs is in fact a 'program restructuring' is simply unacceptable.

5. Finally, as the attached analysis provided by the Child Care Advocacy Forum indicates, we regrettably cannot share your optimism that the new Operating Funding Program will support stability or equity. The reality is that your government is significantly reducing its over-all level of support for the regulated child care sector and is directing these reduced dollars to programs that will primarily serve families who can afford to pay maximum user fees.

It should come as little surprise that we will not always agree on the best way to ensure access to quality affordable child care in BC. In a democracy, different perspectives are to be expected and can be healthy. However, we do expect that you will provide the public with a full and transparent accounting of government's intentions and actions. We therefore call on you to correct or clarify your recent statements so that British Columbians will have the facts from which to engage in an open and constructive dialogue.

Sincerely

Susan Harney
Chairperson

cc. Bill Good c/o CKNW
Premier Gordon Campbell