

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

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

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Open Letter to Minister Linda Reid June 2007

Dear Minister Reid

July 1, 2007, the day on which your government will cut Child Care Operating Funds (CCOF) for licensed family and group child care programs across BC is fast approaching. As the date draws closer, we are hearing from our community across BC about families facing impossible choices, caregivers despairing after years of dedicated service and organizations unable to yet again find a way to make do.

There are no organizational reserves or cost savings to cover the loss of CCOF. The child care community is already under funded and reeling from years of instability. The sector is in the midst of a human resource crisis as current wages are too low to recruit and maintain quality early childhood educators.

So, as advised by you, child care fees across BC are going up. For infant/toddler care, increases of \$75 a month are needed just to cover CCOF cuts let alone improve wages or meet other escalating operating costs. Total monthly fees for children under 3 could now be over \$1000 a month. More families will have no choice but to remove their children from licensed care and scramble to find alternatives. Other families will have to leave the labour force or reduce their working hours deepening BC's growing labour shortage and on-going concerns about family poverty. Children, families and the whole community will pay the cost for years to come.

While you claim to be concerned about the most vulnerable families, you seem blind to the fact that **all** families will have to pay higher fees. Families who receive a provincial child care subsidy to help cover child care costs, most of whom already pay for the difference between the subsidy they receive and the actual cost of care, will have to cover fee increases out of their own pockets just like everyone else.

Again, you rationalize this away by saying that families should use the taxable family allowance they receive from the federal government to pay higher child care fees. Yet, other early learning programs that you fund, including Family Resource Programs and the new Strong Start programs where parents must attend with their children are **free**. Even though all families get the federal allowance, only working families who need child care are being punished by your government.

As devastating as these realities are for individual families and communities, the real tragedy is that the July 1st cuts to CCOF are totally unnecessary.

You blame the cuts on the loss of dedicated federal child care transfer payments saying that you had no choice but to spend \$95 million in remaining federal child care funds on one-time-only grants rather than ongoing funding for CCOF. But BC's outgoing Acting Auditor General and the current Comptroller General have both publicly confirmed that the province has the ability to make decisions about child care spending this year and beyond. It is revealing that BC is the **only province** to cut ongoing child care funds while engaging in a flurry of unaccountable year end spending in response to the reduction in dedicated federal funds.

And, even without federal funds, BC has the money it needs to sustain CCOF. BC's expected surplus for 2006/07 is \$3 billion. All that's lacking is the political will to allocate a mere \$15 million to at least maintain current CCOF levels let alone begin to build the child care system BC needs.

We know that you have heard these arguments before from thousands of British Columbians. To date, you have not listened. On behalf of the children, families, child care providers and communities of BC, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is making one last call to reason. Act now to stop the slated July 1st cuts to CCOF or expect to be held accountable for the chaos that will follow.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC