



September 6, 2016

Honourable Michelle Stilwell  
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation  
PO Box 9058, Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Stilwell,

I am writing on behalf of our coalition members to ask you to work with your government to authorize a simple amendment to the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Regulation, specifically to reclassify pregnancy and birth-related Employment Insurance (EI) benefits as earned income, rather than as unearned income. This would remove the discriminatory effect of current policy on women who qualify for these benefits as a result of their work and EI contributions, but are not allowed to benefit from them when they are on maternity or parental leave.

Our coalition members share a deep concern about this issue because the impact of this policy is to plunge already poor families into even deeper poverty right at the time when a newborn child joins them. We are acutely aware of the critical window of opportunity for infants' brain growth and general development in this post-natal period. This creates an imperative to make sure parents get the support they need, including sufficient income to support healthy infant development.

Early childhood development research evidence also underscores the hazards of poverty-related stress on the physical and mental health of parents and their children, especially at a key time for developing a strong and healthy attachment between infant and parents. In short, the stress of having a reduced income in the perinatal period due to the clawback of mothers' EI benefits is putting children's healthy development at risk.

As you are aware, there is a human rights case pending in BC on the discriminatory impact of this policy on women. The complainant is just one of an average 150 mothers affected annually by this policy. Your action to amend this regulation to eliminate this income reduction would have significant immediate and on-going benefits for some of the most vulnerable infants and families in BC. It would also spare the government and the complainant the ordeal of fighting this case to its conclusion.

We urge you to take leadership to make this change, as you have done on other income and disability assistance regulatory amendments that have benefited single parents on assistance. Assuming government is committed to making sure our public policies have children's well-being in mind, surely this reform must follow.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your reply.

**putting children and youth first**

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810 - 815 W. Hastings St. Vancouver, BC V6C 1B4

604 709 6962 TOLL FREE 1 800 307 1212 [info@firstcallbc.org](mailto:info@firstcallbc.org) [www.firstcallbc.org](http://www.firstcallbc.org)

Sincerely,



Adrienne Montani  
Provincial Coordinator

Copies: Terry Lake, Minister of Health  
Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development  
Premier Christy Clark  
Michelle Mungall, Opposition Spokesperson for Social Development  
Judy Darcy, Opposition Spokesperson for Health  
Melanie Mark, Opposition Spokesperson for Children and Family Development  
Jennifer Rice, Opposition Deputy Spokesperson for Children and Family Development  
Maurine Karagianis, Opposition Spokesperson for Early Childhood Development  
John Horgan, Leader of the Opposition