



October 5, 2016

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

Dear Minister Stilwell,

We are writing to thank the BC government for doing the right thing and ending the clawback of child-related Employment Insurance benefits from income and disability assistance recipients.

As we noted in our letter of September 6, 2016, this change will benefit hundreds of BC families with new infants, who already live in poverty, at a crucial time in their lives and development. This change better reflects the evidence around the impacts of deepening poverty on post-natal human development and the post-adoption period. It also halts the discrimination against women who worked to earn maternity and parental benefits, only to have it called "unearned" income and deducted from their partner's disability benefit.

The families who shared their stories about the impacts of this policy in our *2015 BC Child Poverty Report Card* and later in other media deserve our thanks and admiration for helping government to make this decision. We are grateful also for the support of your colleague MLA Michelle Mungall and the other community organizations who advocated for this policy change.

Our thanks also goes to government for including in this amendment the end to the clawback of EI benefits for parents caring for critically ill children. We were not aware that this benefit was also classified as unearned income under the regulations and that parents on assistance in such a period of distress would lose this too.

First Call coalition members appreciate the efforts of government over the past 18 months to eliminate some of the most egregious income clawbacks from social assistance recipients that affected children and to remove barriers to getting off assistance affecting single parents.

There remains more work to do in relation to clawbacks, which we hope government will next turn its attention to. We refer in particular to the clawback of Canada Pension Plan **survivor's pension** benefits from parents on social assistance. The loss of this income, earned by the contributions of the deceased spouse, has a direct impact on the ability of surviving parents on assistance to raise their children in good health and offer them the developmental opportunities they need to thrive. This is especially true in the current situation where income and disability rates for both shelter and support are unconscionably low and completely disconnected from the actual costs parents face.

putting children and youth first

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We look forward to working with government to implement further reforms to improve the health and well-being of children and the parents who struggle to care for them while living in deep poverty on social assistance. We know that with the introduction of adequate income supports and other necessary services for children, youth and families now in poverty, there would be fewer children taken into the child welfare system, savings for the provincial budget in health care, justice and education, and rising rates of family homelessness would decrease. These are all goals we can and should be working to achieve together.

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