



TransLink Board of Directors
Mayors' Council on Regional Transportation
Via email: Christian.Neubert@Translink.ca and mike.buda@mayorscouncil.ca

May 28, 2018

Attention: Mayor Derek Corrigan, Chair, Mayors' Council of Regional Transportation and Lorraine Cunningham, Chair, TransLink Board of Directors

Re: First Call Presentation to the Joint Public Meeting, May 24, 2018

Dear Mayor Corrigan and Ms. Cunningham:

Thank you for the opportunity to present to your joint meeting on the topic of affordable and accessible public transportation for families and children.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is a non-partisan coalition of 101 provincial and regional organizations who have united their voices to put children and youth first in BC through public education, community mobilization, and public policy advocacy.

Every November, First Call, with the support of the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC), releases a report card with the latest statistics on child and family poverty in BC and recommendations for policy changes that would reduce these poverty levels.

The data and recommendations in our annual report cards are highly respected and are widely used by our members and allies, the media and decision-makers.

The latest figures from Statistics Canada (2015) once again show that too many BC children — 153,300 or 1 in 5 — are growing up in poverty. For the past sixteen years (2000–2015) an astounding half of all children in lone-parent families in BC, most of them female-led, have lived in poverty. Lone parents with a disability and children under 25 have an astronomical poverty rate of 53%.

Other findings include

- nearly half (45%) of recent immigrant children were poor;
- one in three (31%) Indigenous children were poor (not counting children living on First Nations reserves);
- more than one in three (39%) children living with other relatives were poor; and
- and one in four 'visible minority' (or racialized) children were poor.

putting children and youth first

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The statistics on the depth of poverty show poor children in BC, including those living with parents working full-time or part-time, are being raised on median annual incomes more than \$10,000 below the poverty lines for their respective family sizes.

Simply put, the data tells us that every day one in five households with children are making hard decisions. We've heard from parents across this region that some days it's a choice between food or rent.

Increasingly we are hearing that households are unable to afford public transportation to reach doctor's appointments, public services, school and job interviews.

As we prepared to release the 2017 Child Poverty Report Card, one family shared their story with us:

"I can only access what we can walk to," Sabrina says, "we really don't travel on transit — we have to walk everywhere." She says they would have to take the bus to access the swimming pool or the skating rink, so they rarely do; the walks are too long with their young elementary school aged children and new baby girl.

"It is a scramble to try to get anywhere," says her husband, Shawn. "There is so much around that is out of reach — community centres, the PNE, Grouse Mountain — but we can't afford the bus rides after food, paying rent, paying the bills."

Accessing health care for the whole family is also a major struggle due to their mobility crisis. They are currently searching for a family clinic within walking distance that can take them all.

Reducing poverty is about enough income but it's also about affordable access to basic services. And the responsibility for reducing poverty lies across all areas of government and at all three levels. Both the federal and provincial governments are developing poverty reduction strategies and municipalities from Vancouver to Halifax are looking at the role of local governments to reduce the institutional barriers people living in poverty face to fully participating in society.

Access to free or affordable public transportation is a key strategy in reducing barriers to health care, education, food security and employment.

As you plan the future of public transportation in this region, First Call urges you to consider the access needs of low-income people at every stage of decision-making.

Specifically, we draw your attention to Recommendation #20 from First Call's 2017 Child Poverty Report Card:

The provincial government should work with local governments and transit authorities to develop a plan that will **provide free public transit for minors (ages 0-18)**.

In addition, we believe **transit should be free or reduced for all low-income people** regardless of their demographic profile. We suggest that individuals living in households with an annual income lower than the Low Income Measure-After Tax (LIM-AT) ride transit at no cost. The LIM is a relative measure of poverty set at 50% of median adjusted household income that takes household size into account. It is also internationally comparable.

As an immediate action, **we ask you to stop fining minors for fare evasion**. We are hearing from youth in and leaving care about harassment from collection agencies and moving into adulthood saddled with poor credit scores for the crime of being poor. This punitive policy of ticketing those least able to pay is leading to more barriers including access to basic banking services, obtaining a driver's license and BC services card. In other words, this practice is perpetuating the circumstances that trap people in the crisis zone of poverty.

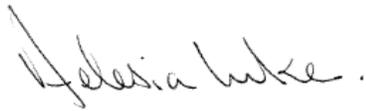
Lastly, we encourage you to **look at the potential negative implications of distance-pricing** on low income households as rents in urban centres become even more unaffordable.

First Call is aware of budgetary, mandate and legislative challenges related to implementing fare reductions and other measures we recommend. **We are hopeful, however, that in your capacity to manage the regional public transportation system you both appreciate the growing and urgent need for action, and endeavor to advance this issue with your provincial counterparts.**

First Call will also be contacting the Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Finance, and the Parliamentary Secretary for TransLink about this issue.

We need a fair transit fare structure to ensure no low-income parent, child or youth misses a doctor's appointment, a day at school or a visit to the community centre because public transportation is unaffordable.

Thank you for your time and attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helesia Luke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helesia Luke
Communications and Development Coordinator
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