



May 8, 2020

Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development
Honourable Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child Care
Via E-mail: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca and CC.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: Early Childhood Development and Care during COVID-19

Dear Ministers Conroy and Chen,

On behalf of First Call's Early Childhood Development Roundtable (ECDRT) I am writing to share concerns expressed by the forty-three people from around the province who participated via Zoom in our March 25th meeting.

Many issues raised were related to the fragility of providers of early child development services and the families they serve as a result of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then some of these issues may have been addressed, but it is still important to record them because most members of the ECD Roundtable provide services that are integral to the success of your ministry's mandate.

Child care providers spoke about closing doors on March 16th because staff were afraid to come to work. They were concerned that they would lose MCFD child care funding as of that date and did not know if they could or would be able to reopen for special services. They were also worried about the impact of the Temporary Emergency Funding (TEF) on Employment Insurance for their laid-off staff and wondered if staff who subsequently took up work for a higher hourly wage with essential services, such as grocery store chains, would be willing to return to their jobs and lower wages.

A participant explained that although her organization was no longer collecting fees staff still had to be paid because they have long-term workers who, according to their contracts, must be given 5 months notice. They said the TEF that covers up to approximately 20% of their operating costs is not enough to keep their service viable.

Another member spoke about establishing an online preschool for their vulnerable population and wondered if this online approach would qualify them as an 'open' program in which case they might get the TEF to cover up to 75% of their operating costs. In fact, there were many questions and concerns about BC's financial incentive package. These included: the disparity between providers getting 7 times their CCOF payments if they stayed open but only 2 times CCOF if they closed; reports that some services were staying open to get the 7x CCOF plus the parent fees even though they had few children enrolled and their staffing and other operating costs had decreased; and, last but not least, the apparent lack of accountability for the TEF funding.

Providers of other ECD services spoke about staff working remotely, where possible, by offering phone calls, virtual meetings, consultations, play and other therapy sessions online. Some are dropping off groceries and play kits to families. A repeated concern was related to the stress resulting from the

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isolation of their families, including those with children in foster care and the effect of court closures on families awaiting decisions on next steps for their children.

However, the ingenuity of these services is overshadowed by concern about contract deliverables, such as not being able to meet monthly reporting requirements because staff are working from home. They described pending service reductions and/or closures due to changes to contract funding allocations. This conversation was stimulated by a presentation by the Deaf Children's Society (DCS). It illustrated that while the number of families accessing their services has doubled over the last ten years the funding amount has remained constant, so MCFD funding represents an ever-decreasing percentage of the DCS budget. Critical in their case but experienced by others as well.

We recognise that government officials are working hard to address the crisis brought about by COVID-19 but urge your government to engage a post-pandemic impact lens on the policy and practice decisions that you are currently making.

We urge you to press pause on contract decisions that negatively affect vulnerable populations and relax contract reporting requirements in the short term.

It is imperative that the fragile infrastructure supporting early childhood care and learning in BC is not further eroded during this pandemic and that we take to heart the lessons learned during this period about the essential importance of quality child care and other early childhood support and intervention programs in order to build the system BC families need at the end of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

Sincerely,

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

Adrienne Montani
Provincial Coordinator