



February 4, 2025

Honourable Jodie Wickens
Minister of Children and Family Development
Via Email: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: Support for mandatory registration for all social workers with the BC College of Social Workers

Dear Minister Wickens,

We are writing in support of the long-standing call by the BC Association of Social Workers for mandatory registration with the BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) for all social workers in BC. Specifically, we call upon you to remove the current exemption in section 4(2) of the Social Workers Regulation, under the Social Work Act, that permits social workers working for your ministry, other government bodies, Indigenous groups, and agencies to practise without registration with the BC College of Social Workers.

Justice Thomas Gove's 1996 report, which recommended the creation of your ministry, included recommendations for all social workers to be governed by a self-governing professional body. A 1997 government working group then recommended "*that no one be permitted to practice social work unless they were registered with a new College of Social Workers, established under the Health Professions Act.*" The BC Ombudsman reinforced this recommendation in a 1998 report. ([Public-Report-No-36-Getting-There-A-Review-of-the-Implementation-of-the-Report-of-the-Gove-Child-Protection.pdf](#), pages 136-138). Many other organizations have made this recommendation, including the First Nations Leadership Council.

Additionally, In 2020, the Ministry of Health's Steering Committee on Modernization of Health Professional Regulation recommended that the oversight body prioritize review of social workers, for regulation under the Health Professions Act.

First Call is adding our voice to this repeated call for mandatory registration of all social workers with the BC College of Social Workers because of our deep concern over the well-being of children and youth who are, or may come into, the care of your ministry or receive services from unregistered social workers through other workplaces. Requiring registration for all social workers with the BCCSW is one way to help ensure children and families are protected from sub-standard and potentially harmful practice by ministry frontline workers in child protection and guardianship roles and elsewhere. Indeed, there have been too many examples of these harms occurring in reports by the BC Ombudsperson and the BC Representative for Children and Youth.

The BCSSW is set up to establish, monitor and enforce standards of practice, to receive and investigate complaints and discipline registrants. Families should be able to rely on rigorous certification of the qualifications and good standing in the College of MCFD staff who wield the

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power to remove and/or supervise the care of their children. The current situation, where anyone can call themselves a social worker (even without any social work education) if they work for exempted employers, is not in children's best interests or the public interest.

Your ministry's challenges with recruitment and retention of social workers in the child protection field, and the 2019 response to lower educational qualifications for staff in frontline child protection and guardianship roles, places organizational concerns above the rights of BC's vulnerable children, youth and families to the highest quality of service and accountability. Registration in a well-regulated and respected regulatory and credentialing body, along with title protection, is more likely to attract dedicated people considering a career in social work, rather than diluting qualifications and exempting them from BCCSW registration. Registration with a governing body also functions to protect social workers with support for continuing professional development and peer-created ethical standards to ground their practice.

We note that in 2013 the exemption from registration for health authority social workers was removed from Social Worker Regulation, creating a situation of full public accountability on healthcare teams. In your mandate letter from the Premier, you are charged with designing and implementing a comprehensive child well-being plan that aligns services across ministries and agencies. Removing the exemption from registration for MCFD social workers will build confidence among team members from other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, that their MCFD colleagues have appropriate qualifications and a commitment to ethical practice through the BCCSW.

We add that we are in strong support of the Ministry hiring multidisciplinary teams of people with experience and connections to Indigenous and other cultural communities, with different skill levels, responsibilities and job titles, to work alongside registered social workers in the child protection system and others.

We hope to hear your ministry's plans to make the needed change to the regulations to require mandatory registration for all who call themselves social workers.

Sincerely,



Handwritten signatures of Jim Staton and Adrienne Montani in blue ink. Jim Staton's signature includes the text 'BSW, MSW, RSW' written below it.

Jim Staton
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Executive Director

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