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March 11, 2010

Honourable Mary Polak  
Minister of Children and Family Development  
PO Box 2057 STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Polak:

I am writing at the request of several of our members who have expressed considerable concern over your recent appointment of Heather Stilwell to the board of the BC College of Social Workers.

We acknowledge that Ms. Stilwell brings valued administrative and legislative experience to the BCCSW Board through her past service on the Surrey School board. However, as you are likely aware, many social workers have reacted very strongly to Ms. Stilwell's appointment, citing her publicly stated positions on homosexuality, abortion and other issues which they believe run contrary to social work values. They question why someone whose views differ so radically from deeply-held social work principles was selected to be a public appointee to a college of social workers. These principles are made clear in our *Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics*:

- *Social workers respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and uphold human rights.*
- *Social workers uphold each person's right to self-determination, consistent with that person's capacity and with the rights of others.*
- *Social workers respect the diversity among individuals in Canadian society and the right of individuals to their unique beliefs consistent with the rights of others.*

*“As professionals in a country that upholds respect for diversity, and in keeping with democratic rights and freedoms, social workers respect the distinct systems of beliefs and lifestyles of individuals, families, groups, communities and nations without prejudice (United Nations Centre for Human Rights, 1992). Specifically, social workers do not tolerate discrimination based on age, abilities, ethnic background, gender, language, marital status, national ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.... Social workers uphold the human rights of individuals and groups as expressed in The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)”.*

We recognize that Ms. Stilwell is just one of twelve board members, with one vote, and that having dissenting viewpoints can broaden and strengthen discourse amongst the Board. It is also fundamental to social work practice to work across differences, and we have confidence that the new BCCSW Board will be up to any challenges in this regard.

Nonetheless, the appointment of Ms. Stilwell has created a huge distraction for the newly formed College, a predictable result given her well known views. It would have been helpful to inaugurate the new College Board by appointing a public member who was considered more broadly acceptable to the social work community. Our members have requested that BCASW monitor for any issues that emerge from this appointment that could be considered detrimental to the profession.

We recollect that you were one of the MLAs who fought the delay of the legislation to create the College of Social Workers, and know that you are a strong supporter of our new College. We are always available should you wish to consult on future appointments to the Board.

Sincerely,

Pamela Miller, PhD RSW  
President, BCASW