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March 25, 2015

The Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
Box 9041, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1
premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier;

I am writing on behalf of the BC Association of Social Workers, to thank you and your Cabinet for listening to anti-poverty activists, rescinding the policy, and making child-support payments fully exempt for families receiving income and disability assistance. We understand that this will put \$13 million into the hands of some of the poorest British Columbians. There is room to do more and I encourage you to reconsider your government's decision to phase-out increased taxation for British Columbians making in excess of \$150,000.

An increase in welfare rates is long overdue; they have been frozen for eight years. This was a unanimous recommendation by a bi-partisan committee of MLAs before your government's recent budget. The committee also recommended a review of the minimum wage. BC is the only province which did not raise its minimum wage in 2014. A single parent raising one child and working full time for the entire year would still be \$8,000 below the poverty line; the income line where they could afford the bare essentials. We recognize your government's intention to raise the minimum wage by \$.20 per hour, however a more significant effort is required if any progress is to be made toward having every employee earn a living wage in BC. Even an increase of the minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour would still leave many families below the poverty line.

We applaud your government's recent moves to increase the earning exemption for families with children who receive income assistance from \$200 to \$400 a month, to continue assistance to single parents for a year while attending school, and to assist them with tuition and education costs as well as bus fare and child care. These measures will assist families however we encourage your government to implement other recommendations from the MLAs' pre-budget consultation including:

- that assistance to persons with disabilities rise to reflect cost-of-living increases,
- that the province develop and implement an affordable public child care plan,
- that an increased supply of affordable social and co-op housing be developed, especially for people with disabilities.

These changes could be made as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. BC is the only province not to undertake a poverty reduction plan. Our Association is partnered with agencies and communities across the province calling for the establishment of such a plan.

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Your government posted a surplus of \$1 billion dollars last year and is projecting a future surplus. We are deeply concerned that this surplus is at the cost of ignoring pressing social needs. Many British Columbian families continue to struggle with economic insecurity and poverty.

Social workers are aware of the social costs of poverty. We remain willing to work with your government to find and implement the best strategies to support families effectively in ways that benefit the province as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Crawford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent than the last name "Crawford".

Michael Crawford, RSW
President, BC Association of Social Workers

.cc Michelle Mungall, MLA, Opposition Critic, michelle.mungall@leg.bc.ca
Michelle Stilwell, Minister for Soc. Dev. & Soc. Innovation, michelle.stilwell.mla@leg.bc.ca