

July 19th, 2012

Dear colleagues,

Several weeks ago I wrote to advise you of actions being taken to help address the key issues and concerns you have raised regarding the challenges of using the ICM computer system to support your work. This included two of our transactional programs but particularly the complex and critically important area of child welfare.

At that time – and in addition to a five point action plan announced early in July – I asked regional leadership to meet with all child welfare team leaders in order to provide me a comprehensive, accurate, ‘on-the-ground’ snapshot of ICM – how staff were using it, the challenges they were facing, where it was working for them and where it wasn’t and whether, in its current state, it was effectively supporting our child protection work.

Last Wednesday, I was provided with a briefing on the key themes arising from this consultation, making clear to me the need for further and immediate action – particularly the provision of additional staffing resources -- to build on the steps outlined in the action plan. The concerns you have raised – and the critical need to create a system which better reflects the complex work we do – are at the heart of today’s decision to delay the majority of this year’s MCFD ICM Phase 3 work (with the exception of transactional programs) so that we can focus much more strongly on two key areas: **strengthening the child protection areas of the new computer system** and dedicating additional resources to ensure all child protection workers are **fully trained to use the new system** in support of their child protection work. To facilitate this we have been provided with up to an additional \$12 million in funding that can be used to support additional resources during the balance of this fiscal year.

Recognizing the very real challenges you have faced in trying to balance both your work with children and youth, and learning a new computer system that is not as intuitive as it should -- or could -- be in this area, we will be increasing child protection staffing levels to help address workload issues during training periods, and provide additional resources throughout the balance of the year while we embed the new system in support of our practice. We want to ensure you have the ability to focus on learning and using the new system knowing that the critical work of protecting children, youth and families is not – and *will not* be – compromised. The hiring process for these auxiliary child protection staff -- approximately 100 positions throughout the province for the remainder of the fiscal year -- will begin immediately. This will both facilitate time for learning and using the new system.

In addition we will also reinstate the use of administrative staff to support child welfare workers in using ICM, similar to their role in supporting the MIS system, and add up to 50 auxiliary administrative positions, to ensure adequate time is provided for recording within the system. This builds on a very constructive suggestion given to me by the BCGEU.

During the fall and winter we will work with you to take a good look at the functions and accountabilities of individual jobs as well as overall team functioning linked to supporting quality practice and a healthy workplace as set out in our Operational and Strategic Directional Plan.

Quality assurance will continue to be a key focus of our work within ICM. In addition to our ongoing provincial level monitoring, auditing at the local level and close monitoring of new cases in ICM will be established to provide immediate feedback and support to child protection staff. Additional data stewards will be hired and experienced child protection workers will be trained and will act as 'on the ground' Practice/ICM consultants, supporting team leaders. Any staff assuming these positions will be promptly backfilled at the team level.

As referenced previously, ICM practice training – including individual one-on-one, live meetings and regional face-to-face group training – will be available to all child protection team staff. All staff used for training will be backfilled at the team level. I encourage you to take advantage of these resources and participate in the short [self-assessment survey for child protection workers](#) which will ensure training and resources are developed and targeted to meet individual needs.

The other key piece in this equation is a technical one. While the ICM system as currently developed lends itself more easily to transactional and other social service programs including those provided through our ministry and our project partners in the Ministry of Social Development, it is clear to me that more needs to be done to tailor it to better support our critical and complex work in child protection. Based on your feedback, changes have -- and are -- being made, but to ensure upgrades to the system in the coming months reflect best practice, I have asked for an **independent assessment** to be conducted. The appointed lead for the assessment will be announced in the next few weeks. Information gathered through the assessment, as well as research from other jurisdictions, will be reported out to the minister and myself and will guide next steps in the development -- and/or enhancements -- of the child protection components of ICM. This information will also be used to inform longer term planning around the use of this IT system for child protection practice.

This is, without question, a challenging period for us and I want to reiterate my appreciation for your honesty and forthrightness in bringing your concerns to my attention. As well I want to thank those Lower Mainland staff who recently participated in ICM focused discussions with the Representative's office, the results of which mirrored our own canvassing and reinforced the steps we are taking. I continue to believe strongly in the value and necessity of open and honest dialogue and consultation, not only in planning our future direction as a ministry – as with the creation of our Operational and Strategic Directional Plan -- but also in addressing the obstacles we encounter along the way.

To this end I will be using the time allowed by deferring MCFD's Phase Three work to take a thorough look at the last three year process for our ministry's work on ICM and ensure we have a clear picture of lessons to be learned before moving forward to the next phase.

I want to also thank the Representative for Children and Youth, the BCGEU and the BC Association of Social Workers all of whom have contributed to our discussion of key challenges with this new system – and all of whom have acted as an important sounding board as we have shaped our next steps. I will

continue to work closely with these organizations – and with you – as work progresses on this plan and am committed to keeping you apprised of our progress over the next four to six months as we move forward with this work.

Sincerely,

Stephen Brown
Deputy Minister