



Hon. Christy Clark  
Premier of British Columbia  
West Annex, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC  
V8V 1X4

January 25, 2016

Dear Premier Clark,

I am writing to you as a professional social worker because I continue to be very concerned about the effects of poverty on British Columbians. I work with people who are suffering these effects every day and I am highly aware of the personal and social costs of poverty. I am additionally concerned because we need not pay these costs in British Columbia.

British Columbia can afford to bring every citizen up to the poverty line, the amount of income at which one can pay for the basic necessities of life. Adequate income will significantly reduce or eliminate many poverty-generated costs we as a society are now paying in terms of additional social services, additional educational and criminal justice costs and especially additional health costs.

In a recent speech to the C.D. Howe Institute, Michael McCain, Maple Leaf Foods CEO, quoting a recent study by the Canadian Medical Association, noted that food insecurity increased the cost of health care by up to 121 per cent. Health authorities report that the average monthly cost of nutritious food for a family of four in BC is \$914. A family of four on basic social assistance would receive \$401 exclusive of shelter allowance. Even the addition of the \$358 Family Bonus only brings that amount to \$759. This makes everyone on social assistance food insecure and prone to a long list of expensive health effects including low-weight babies, increases in asthma, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic health conditions. Adequate food is basic health prevention. Working British Columbians being paid the present minimum wage are also operating under similar financial and nutritional stresses.

Because of poverty our province pays \$1.2 billion a year in higher health costs. Similarly, we are paying \$745 million in policing and criminal justice costs for poverty-related crime. Conservative estimates suggest that we are paying several billion dollars in poverty-related services and lost productivity. Ensuring that all citizens receive income at the poverty line would cost half of that.

I am writing to ask your government to raise social assistance to the poverty line so that British Columbians requiring such assistance do not suffer the preventable effects of policy-created poverty. Similarly, increasing the provincial minimum wage so that full-time work produces an income at or above the poverty line will mitigate the negative effects of poverty for working British Columbians.

BC public policy should not create and maintain poverty and stress that make it almost impossible for people to succeed. Public policy should create conditions for well-being that allow people to be more resilient and to improve their life situation. Raising social assistance rates and the minimum wage to the poverty line will provide a foundation upon which people can build successful lives.

Thank you for your attention to these matters in the coming year. I look forward to hearing from you as you remediate these pressing issues of public policy.

Sincerely,

Robert Hart

Advocacy Committee  
Northwest Branch  
BC Association of Social Workers

.cc Hon. Michelle Stillwell, Minister of Social Development & Social Innovation  
John Horgan, Leader of the Opposition

Michelle Mungall, MLA and Opposition Critic for MSDSI  
Doug Donaldson, MLA for Stikine  
Robin Austin, MLA for Skeena  
Jennifer Rice, MLA for North Coast