

March 18th, 2014

The Honourable Don McRae, M.L.A.
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation
PO Box 9058 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E1

Dear Minister McRae;

Re: Child Support Payments and Income Assistance

I am writing on behalf of the BC Association of Social Workers to ask that you end what we see as the unjust practice of deducting child support payments from income assistance recipients' monthly cheques. Support payments are often hard won and are the duty of all non-custodial parents. The funds exist to benefit the child. We understand that your government changed regulations in 2002 and since that time, has taken away every dollar of child support paid to families on income assistance thus ignoring the rights, needs and well-being of the children.

There is ample evidence of the extent and harm of poverty for children in BC. We know that current assistance rates, ensure that recipients live well below the Statistics Canada poverty line. Children living in urban areas where housing and other living costs are extremely high, experience an even deeper poverty along with all the related risks.

First Call BC, West Coast Women's LEAF, and the Community Legal Assistance Society report that your Ministry takes approximately \$15 million annually in child support payments from income assistance recipients. While this amount constitutes only 1% of your Ministry's income assistance budget, if spread evenly across the 4,000 affected families, it would mean an increase in their annual income of approximately \$3,750. These funds still would not raise families above the poverty line, however, they would give parents and grandparents more capacity to provide healthy food and safe, accessible housing and other essentials for the children.



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We ask that you amend the Employment and Assistance Regulation and the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Regulation to add an unearned income exemption for child support payments up to \$300 per child per month.

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss our request and recommendations in further detail.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barb Keith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barb Keith MSW RSW
President, BC Association of Social Workers