

Response by email: 10th April 2014

Ref: 182423

Barb Keith
President
BC Association of Social Workers
bcasw@bcasw.org

Dear Ms. Keith:

Thank you for your letter dated March 18, 2014, regarding the effect of family maintenance payments on income assistance benefits, and your recommendation that \$300 of these payments per month per child be exempted when calculating clients' total unearned income.

It is important to look at income exemptions within the overall purpose of the BC Employment and Assistance (BCEA) program. The BCEA program provides temporary help to those who are able to work, and longer-term assistance to those who have a disability or barrier to work.

It is an income- and asset-tested program and a payer of last resort, and clients must access other sources of support and income, including most unearned income such as family maintenance, before they are eligible for assistance.

British Columbia's treatment of family maintenance payments is consistent with most other provinces in Canada. The program helps ensure that individuals who have a legal responsibility to support their families do so before their families receive assistance.

The ministry estimates the cost of a \$300 child support exemption to be \$10.8M per year. There are no plans to exempt family maintenance payments at this time, but I appreciate your taking the time to share your concerns, and your advocacy on behalf of low-income families.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

Don McRae
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation