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April 16, 2025

Dan Levitt  
Office of the Seniors Advocate  
6th floor, 1405 Douglas Street  
PO Box 9651, Stn Prov Gov  
Victoria, BC  
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Dear Dan Levitt,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on February 11, 2025, and for your thoughtful and supportive responses regarding the pressing issues we raised. We appreciate your ongoing commitment to improving the lives of seniors in British Columbia, and we are grateful for your willingness to raise these important matters with key stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Health.

As we discussed, social workers play a vital role in long-term care (LTC) and assisted living (AL) settings. Social workers bring essential skills and perspectives, helping to address the complex emotional, social, and psychological needs of residents. Their holistic lens in care planning, advocacy, and support for AL/LTC residents and their families is critical in promoting overall well-being and quality of life. Despite this, we currently lack concrete data on the number of social workers in AL/LTC settings across BC, and we would appreciate the Office of the Seniors Advocate's support in collecting or accessing this data. Such information would be instrumental in demonstrating the importance of social work services and helping to secure the necessary resources for these roles.

Aligned with your advocacy for increased direct care hours to meet the new nationally recommended guideline of 4.1 direct care hours per resident per day, we are calling for the inclusion of social workers in this framework to ensure that the diverse needs of residents are adequately met, especially given the significant mental and emotional demands of living in AL/LTC settings. We have been advocating and calling for mandated social work positions in AL/LTC since 2019 (see our BCASW Brief) as we believe that social workers should be recognized as part of essential allied health care services, and we urge the Ministry of Health to take steps to mandate social workers within the 4.41-hour framework.

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We also call for regulated social workers in AL/LTC settings as a matter of public protection and accountability. The presence of regulated social workers ensures that residents receive high-quality, evidence-based care that adheres to ethical standards and provides safeguards for vulnerable populations.

As discussed, we strongly believe that a Multisectoral Advisory Forum is the most effective strategy for driving systems-wide change to BC's LTC settings. Such a forum would bring together research, best practices, and the passion of residents, families, staff, professionals, researchers, and government to create a more holistic and transparent solution to the ongoing crisis. Unlike isolated discussions with individual stakeholders, the Advisory Forum would allow for an open exchange of concerns and proposals from all sectors, ensuring that every perspective is considered as we work towards meaningful change.

We also support the National Institute on Aging's recent report emphasizing the importance of prioritizing small care home models in future LTC services. Drawing from the lived experiences of many caregivers, there is a clear need for quality respite services and smaller, more personalized care environments. Publicly-funded, small-scale care homes offer an alternative to the institutionalization seen in large, privately-operated yet publicly-funded residences, and help prevent unnecessary LTC admissions. A Multisectoral Advisory Forum, where the voices of caregivers are acknowledged, could provide valuable insights into the consequences of underinvesting in services that truly meet the needs of caregivers and their families.

Finally, we fully support your efforts to address ageism and look forward to the findings of the Office of the Seniors Advocate's 2024 survey on the issue. We also support awareness campaigns that may follow the report's release. Ageism has long been a significant barrier for seniors, and it is crucial that we continue to raise awareness and advocate for an intersectional approach that addresses diverse needs. As you pointed out, ageism is often overlooked compared to other forms of discrimination, yet it profoundly impacts seniors' quality of life. We believe that increasing awareness of the intersecting issues seniors face will help highlight their needs and promote services that improve their quality of life. Additionally, we share your concern about integrating anti-ageism strategies into broader diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, ensuring that seniors are not overlooked and their voices are heard in all areas of policy and societal change.

In closing, we look forward to continuing this important conversation and hope for tangible, positive outcomes from these discussions. We remain committed to advocating for the critical role of social workers in AL/LTC settings, as their contributions are essential to addressing the complex needs of residents and their families. We are grateful for your continued support in raising these issues with key stakeholders and for championing the voices and well-being of seniors across the province. Thank you for your dedication and for the ongoing collaboration toward a more equitable and inclusive future for long-term care in BC.

Thank you again for your time, support, and leadership. We will be in touch about next steps in this collaborative effort and are optimistic about the potential for meaningful change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Celeste Ann Borgia". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Celeste" being more prominent.

Celeste Ann Borgia

On behalf of Members of the BCASW Seniors Community of Practice

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Crawford". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent.

Michael Crawford MSW, RSW,

President, BC Association of Social Workers

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Celeste Ann Borgia". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Celeste" being more prominent.