

## **Municipal resolution: Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan for British Columbia**

### **WHEREAS:**

1. The poverty rate in British Columbia continues to be among the highest in Canada, and child poverty rates in B.C. are still 1 in 5;
2. BC is the last province in Canada to have a commitment to a poverty reduction plan;
3. British Columbians are ashamed of the levels of poverty and homelessness across our province;
4. Many impacts of poverty are experienced at the local level, and local residents pay for poverty in increased health care costs, higher crime, higher demand for community, social and charitable services, lack of school readiness, reduced school success, and lower economic productivity;
5. The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (the "Coalition") includes community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, businesses, labour organizations, and social policy groups;
6. The Coalition has come together around a campaign aimed at seeing the introduction of a bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan from the government of British Columbia that would include legislated targets and timelines for the health and wellbeing of all British Columbians;
7. Over 400 organizations throughout BC have signed on to the Coalition's Open Letter containing the call for a provincial poverty reduction plan.

### **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:**

THAT this council endorse the Coalition's open letter; and

### **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

THAT this council submit the attached resolution to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities before June 30, 2016, urging the Government of BC to adopt a comprehensive and accountable poverty reduction plan consistent with the recommendations of the Coalition.

### **For more information:**

Contact: Trish Garner, Community Organizer, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

Email: [trish@bcpovertyreduction.ca](mailto:trish@bcpovertyreduction.ca)

Phone: 604-877-4553

Website: [bcpovertyreduction.ca](http://bcpovertyreduction.ca)

## **UBCM resolution: Call for a Poverty Reduction Plan for British Columbia**

WHEREAS the poverty rate in British Columbia continues to be among the highest in Canada yet BC is the last province in Canada to have a commitment to a poverty reduction plan;

AND WHEREAS many impacts of poverty are experienced at the local level, and local residents pay for poverty in increased health care costs, higher crime, higher demand for community, social and charitable services, lack of school readiness, reduced school success, and lower economic productivity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of British Columbia Municipalities urge the Government of BC to follow the lead of all other provinces by adopting a comprehensive and accountable poverty reduction plan, with:

- legislated targets and timelines to
  - reduce BC's poverty rate by 30 per cent within four years, and by 75 per cent within 10 years,
  - ensure the poverty rate for children, lone-mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and mental illness, and recent immigrants and refugees likewise declines by 30 per cent in four years, and by 75 per cent in ten years, in recognition that poverty is concentrated in these populations,
  - within two years, ensure that every British Columbian has an income that reaches at least 75 per cent of the poverty line,
  - within two years, ensure no one has to sleep outside, and end all homelessness within eight years (ensuring all homeless people have good quality, appropriate housing); and
- specific policy measures and concrete actions, including
  - providing adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed, and removing policy barriers so that recipients can build and maintain assets,
  - improving the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce,
  - addressing the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty,
  - addressing homelessness and adopting a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan,
  - providing universal publicly-funded child care,
  - enhancing support for training and education for low-income people,
  - enhancing community mental health and home support services, and expanding integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services.

### **For more information:**

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April 21, 2016

Honourable Christy Clark, MLA  
Premier of British Columbia  
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark:

**RE: BC Budget 2016 – Disability Assistance Rates and Transportation Programs**

We are writing in response to your government's budget, tabled on February 16, 2016, which announced a modest increase of \$77 to persons with disabilities benefits while also drastically changing important programs that improve access to transportation for many people with disabilities. For the reasons set out in this letter, our organizations strongly oppose the changes to the BC Bus Pass Program and the Special Transportation Subsidy. We call on the government to leave these programs in place, and to provide a meaningful rate increase for all income assistance and disability assistance recipients.

The BC Bus Pass Program currently offers an annual bus pass at a reduced cost of \$45 per year for disability assistance recipients in areas where BC Transit and Translink operate. The Special Transportation Subsidy provides a lump sum subsidy to people who reside in an area where the Bus Pass Program operates, but are unable to use public transit because of a disability, to help offset the cost of alternative transportation. Approximately 55,000 of the 100,000 provincial disability assistance recipients rely on one of these two transportation programs. Many of our organizations work directly with people with disabilities, and all are acutely aware of the importance of these programs to ensure people are able to move about their communities, whether that be to shop for basic necessities, attend medical appointments, go to school, or take part in social gatherings.

As you know, those who rely on these programs will now be charged \$52/month for a bus pass, or \$66/month for the Special Transportation Subsidy. This means that for those recipients, the rate increase is actually only \$25 or \$11, respectively. Further, the government has said that it will still charge the \$45 per year "administrative fee" on top of that. Promoting the change as a \$77 increase to disability rates is misleading and unfair. While the government maintains that its aim is to make the system fairer for people with disabilities who do not currently receive support for transportation, the proposed changes are not the right approach.

It has been almost a decade since the government has increased income assistance and disability rates—and at \$906 per month, disability assistance rates in BC are among the lowest in the country. In Alberta, for example, the government increased the

comparable disability benefit (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH)) to \$1588 in 2012. The recently announced \$77 increase to BC's disability assistance rates would be a welcome (if inadequate) change, if it were truly providing that increase to all.

When the change was announced, the Honourable Minister of Finance Michael de Jong spoke about how it would allow those on disability assistance "the freedom to make their own choice about how to meet their own unique transportation needs". For many living in poverty in BC, this is not a real choice. While the \$77 increase will undeniably help those living outside the areas where the Bus Pass Program and Special Transportation Subsidy operate, it creates an impossible choice for those that do rely on these transportation programs. With disability assistance frozen at a paltry \$906 per month—an amount clearly inadequate to meet basic needs—it will be difficult not to opt to put the \$77 each month toward previously unmet needs like food or rent. The Bus Pass Program and Special Transportation Subsidy allowed vulnerable members of our communities to make a \$45 purchase once per year, and then have a reliable method of transportation year-round. The proposed changes to these programs will result in social isolation for those who "choose" not to renew, particularly for those with disabilities that restrict their mobility.

Finally, we are concerned about implementation of the proposed changes, which will inevitably be fraught with practical problems for both disability assistance recipients and Ministry staff. Over the last several years, there has been a radical shift from in-person services at local Ministry offices to services that are primarily delivered through a centralized phone line and over the internet. Wait times on the phone line are long, and many users of Ministry services lack the reliable phone or computer access required to access the services—and may also lack the capacity to navigate the new systems. It is difficult to reach Ministry staff at all, let alone the appropriate staff for a particular matter. Many that rely on the current transportation programs fear they will be unable to access Ministry staff in a timely way to resolve the issues that arise, and that staff will be ill-equipped to address the problems.

As our provincial government tabled its budget, it celebrated BC's strong financial outlook. Minister de Jong emphasized that BC is in a position to "offer greater support to the most vulnerable among us." It is long past due for the government to make real commitments to do just that – and to share some of this province's wealth with the members of our communities that need it most.

Our organizations collectively urge you to:

- Bring back the \$45 per year bus pass for people with disabilities;
- Eliminate the new \$52/month bus pass fee;
- Allow everyone receiving PWD benefits to keep the \$77/month increase;
- Bring back the Special Transportation Subsidy, and introduce a rural transportation subsidy for those living outside the areas where the Bus Pass Program and Special Transportation Subsidy operate; and
- Raise income and disability assistance significantly by October 1, 2016 to reflect the cost of living, and then index to inflation.

Sincerely,

ORGS

- c. Hon. Mike de Jong, MLA, Minister of Finance  
Hon. Michelle Stilwell, MLA, Minister of Social Development and Social  
Innovation  
John Horgan, MLA, Leader of the Opposition  
Michelle Mungall, MLA Nelson – Creston