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November 20, 2009

OPEN LETTER TO THE PREMIER OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier
Province of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell,

The Early Childhood Educators of BC, writes to you today to outline concerns we have with the state of public policy and spending on programs for children in BC. While we are more than aware of the deficit facing the taxpayers of BC and the challenges your government faces financially, none-the-less, we believe that some of the choices being made are detrimental to children's health and BC's family well-being.

While \$300 million dollars per year is spent on child care in BC, \$200 million of these funds are direct subsidy to low income families. We know this funding is important for low income families, however it does not build a system, increase spaces to combat wait lists nor does it make child care affordable for families. Wait lists are at crisis proportions in this province while early childhood educators are leaving the field as they cannot afford to make a living wage in the profession.

Minor capital grants for child care centres have been decreased from \$5000 per program per year to \$2000 per address per year. In 2008, and again in 2009, child care programs received child care enhancement funding through BC Council for Families. This money is now gone. All of these decreases and changes will impact programs' ability to operate and parent fees will increase once again.

Provincial offices of the infant development programs and supported child development have been eliminated without consultation with parents and programs. We are told the MCFD Safe, Strong and Supported plan will address integrated service, but on the ground we have little information. How will you ensure that children with special needs will receive specialized attention and service without the expertise of these important programs?



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Finally and the most disturbing, for six years in a row, BC has recorded the highest child poverty rates in Canada. How could you have allowed this to happen? BC needs a comprehensive poverty reduction plan which must include the building of a quality, affordable child care system. What are your immediate plans to address this situation? What is your plan to address the child care crisis in BC?

The lack of a comprehensive plan for early care and learning is simply unacceptable. While we understand that the Ministry of Children and Family Development has completed their early years plan, it has not been shared publicly and therefore we are left in the dark as to the direction government plans to take regarding our young children. With birth rates falling and baby boomers retiring, business leaders are raising the alarm bell regarding the lack of qualified workers in the province. The absence of a plan for development of a comprehensive child care system is detrimental to the economy and to helping BC get back to a strong and viable economy.

Under the Ministry of Education, the development of all day kindergarten is a step in the right direction. ECEBC has been supportive of the decision to develop all day kindergarten, but we are now increasingly alarmed that adequate planning and resources have not been directed to its development. You have a huge opportunity to build a strong, comprehensive and full day system that will allow optimum development of five year olds and allow their parents to work or study.

To do this well, requires adequate resources for renovating existing classrooms, hiring educators who are trained to work with this age group and ensure appropriate resources and equipment are in place to support their care and learning. While we understand there will be a need for early childhood educators, the dearth of information and consultation is disconcerting. What is the plan for all day kindergarten? How will working parents be supported to have their children in all day kindergarten?

The Early Childhood Educators of BC await your reply.

Yours truly,

Vi-Anne Zirnhelt
President of the Board