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Vi-Anne Zirnhelt
President of the Board
Early Childhood Educators of BC
2774 East Broadway
Vancouver BC V5M 1Y8

Dear Ms. Zirnhelt:

Thank you for your letter of November 20, 2009, addressed to the Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier, regarding child care and child poverty in British Columbia. As Minister of Children and Family Development and Minister Responsible for Child Care, I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Premier.

The Province recognizes the importance of child care and early years programs in supporting the health and well-being of children from birth to school entry and beyond. While the current global fiscal situation has presented us with challenges, we have reduced administrative and infrastructure costs and redirected funds to protect direct front-line services for children in British Columbia and their families. We continue to provide a range of child and family support services to promote developmental readiness and to give the young children of British Columbia the best possible start in life.

Your letter notes recent impacts to the Infant Development and Supported Child Development Provincial Advisor roles. These have been particularly difficult decisions based on our need to protect direct services to children, youth and their families. The budgets for both direct service programs in the regions are being maintained this fiscal year, nearly \$18 million for the Infant Development Program and more than \$57 million for Supported Child Development to ensure that children with special needs continue to receive necessary programs and services. With continued economic uncertainty, budget pressures and the need to preserve the direct service levels in our agencies, difficult decisions must be made in the best interest of our families.

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With respect to child poverty, I am happy to provide assurances that, for Government, addressing child poverty and well-being is fundamentally important. Because finding solutions to reducing child and youth vulnerability requires action throughout Government, we have and continue to invest heavily in providing focused services that involve many ministries. Through programs such as early childhood education including over 300 StrongStart centres and literacy, child care and rental subsidies, and Medical Services Plan premium relief to low income households, we are making a significant difference. Although encouraging reports from Statistics Canada show that in recent years child poverty in British Columbia has fallen faster than for Canada overall, clearly we have more to do. We remain committed across Government to continue to improve opportunities for vulnerable children and youth.

The Province remains committed to supporting children's early years. We had hoped to be ready to share a draft of an Early Years Plan with stakeholders this year however we are faced with significantly less revenue than was anticipated when this commitment was initially made. As such, we have had to refocus our priorities on existing front-line services for vulnerable children and families. Moving forward, partner ministries have committed to continue working across sectors on early years strategic planning and the Plan is being used as the foundational document for the children's lens of the *Integrated Framework for Children and Youth*.

The development of the *Integrated Framework for Children and Youth* is a key element within *Strong, Safe and Supported*. Effectively, the integrated framework will apply a children's well-being lens to government policy and will further coordinate existing initiatives for the benefit of children.

We are pleased that the Early Childhood Educators of BC is supportive of full-day kindergarten. Access to quality child care and early learning programs are essential to the long-term success of British Columbia's children and families. I assure you that Government understands full-day kindergarten will have an impact on child care services. For this reason, the initiative was announced almost a year in advance of its implementation to enable sufficient planning time for school districts and child care operators.

Over the coming months, Ministry of Education staff will be working with every school district regarding space for kindergarten where needed for year two (2011/2012). We continue to work with our partners as full-day kindergarten is implemented. For example, ministry staff are working with the British Columbia Public School Employees Association to develop tools for Boards of Education to assist them as they recruit kindergarten teachers.

For parents and schools, web pages have been created to answer questions as full-day kindergarten implementation work continues. These pages will be updated as more information is available. You may be interested in the questions and answers posted at: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/full_day_kindergarten.htm

Government recognizes that investing in the early years is investing in a better future for everyone. Despite the challenging fiscal situation, Government continues to invest in a range of initiatives to support the optimal health and development of children and families in communities province-wide.

Thank you again for your letter and for demonstrating your commitment to the well-being of British Columbia's children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Polak".

Mary Polak
Minister

pc: Honourable Gordon Campbell