

Vancouver Sea to Sky Branch
c/o BC Association of Social Workers
402 - 1755 West Broadway
Vancouver BC V6J 4S5

Dear MLA,

On behalf of the Vancouver Sea to Sky Branch of the BC Association of Social Workers, I am writing to ask that you support different priorities than those contained in the budget recently released by your government.

While positive economic indicators are trumpeted in the media, the benefits are not shared by all. Among industrialized nations, Canada has a high rate of low wage jobs. This is definitely felt in BC, where 23% of workers earned less than \$10.43 per hour in 2003. Nearly one quarter of these people earned minimum wage, or worse, the so-called training wage. More and more people have at best a tenuous hold in the labour market, and the ranks of the homeless are growing. One in five children in our province live in poverty, and there has been a 40% increase in the use of food banks over the last three years. Churches and other non-profit groups struggle to fill the gaps created by a residual approach to social welfare, but it is not enough.

As social workers, we regularly witness the effects that service withdrawals have had on the poor and vulnerable. Problems increase and worsen, and it becomes harder than ever for people to address the poverty that oppresses them so completely. Hollow tax cuts are not the answer, especially in light of service cuts and user fee hikes that have bled away any savings that low income earners may have seen in the first place.

Progressive public policy in the areas of education, health, and social services is directly linked to better outcomes for children, families and communities. We ask that at least one billion dollars of the surplus that has been generated be restored to the ministries that took the deepest cuts over the years of your mandate. This most certainly includes community and social services.

It has been said that a society should be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members. We sincerely hope that the next provincial government will use its mandate to promote a more just society.

Sincerely,

Duncan Stephen, Chair
Vancouver Sea to Sky Branch