



## **Budget 2024 Priorities Presentation**

### **Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023 – Vancouver; Coast Coal Harbour

Hello, and thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you today.

My name is Viveca Ellis, and I am the executive director of the Centre for Family Equity.

#### **Introduction**

The Centre for Family Equity, formerly known as the Single Mothers' Alliance, addresses family poverty in BC through research, policy recommendations, legal action to address human rights violations, and targeted programs. Our intersectional equity approach tackles discrimination, and our community engagement model enables us to determine strategic priorities that meet the direct needs of families in poverty in BC.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss our three recommendations with you today: free transit for youth, the completion of our universal child care system, and access to justice and legal aid in family law - all budgetary priorities that will address family poverty in BC.

#### **Legal Aid**

The Centre for Family Equity takes a human rights approach. We approach access to justice in family law as a human right that is upheld in BC by our budgetary priorities and available programs. A family law lawyer costs on average between \$350 and \$450 an hour for service in BC; most cases take hundreds of hours to resolve. Many middle-income parents must still enter substantial debt to fund their legal costs. For low-income parents, and especially mothers fleeing intimate partner violence, a situation too often defined by poverty and financial hardship for women, our current system is simply out of reach. And this leaves justice out of reach. And when justice is out of reach, safety, security, and well-being are out of reach. And human rights are denied.

The income cut-off for eligibility remains too low, and funding is too restricted to meet existing needs and ideal caseloads. For the few who do gain access to legal aid, the number of hours provided is often too limited to meaningfully address the complex family law issues facing many families, most of all for those at risk of family violence.

Let's bring access to justice for low-income parents and caregivers back within reach to ensure the safety and security of all families in BC.

**We recommend significant investment to increase the provision of legal aid for low-income parents and caregivers to ensure access to justice and fairness in family law.**

### **Child Care Including Before and After School Care**

In 2018, a commitment was made to build a fully universal \$10 a Day child care system in BC within 10 years. Fast forward to today, and there are now only 12,729 spaces at \$10 a Day ChildcareBC Centres in the province despite significant new investment from the federal government to build a \$10aDay system by 2026 in every province.

While BC was off to a strong start, and despite necessary affordability mechanisms now in place, we are lagging in our systems building.

We do not yet have an actual system that functions equitably for BC's families. Since our current system is half-built, it does not serve the province adequately – it functions too much like a chaotic lottery with some benefiting from universal spaces, and many still unable to find a spot at all. Our research with UBC through 2022 on \$10aDay system access for low-income lone mothers has revealed the positive impacts on marginalized mothers' incomes, health, and well-being when a universal, no-cost space is accessed, and the debilitating impacts when they are shut out. Working parents need dependable, quality before and after school care located on school sites.

A child care system was promised to British Columbians, and budget 2024 is an opportunity to bring this promise to fruition.

**We recommend the expedited completion of our \$10 a Day child care system including before and after school care at school locations to ensure a spot for every child that needs one.**

### **Transit for Teens**

We value the new Get on Board program, implemented in September 2021, which provides free transit for all children up to age 12 in every transit system in BC. This impactful program unburdens thousands of families from the cost of transit to get their families everywhere they need to go at a time of skyrocketing inflation – most importantly their children’s right to access school every day. However, youth 13-18 have been excluded from this necessary program. They do not deserve to be.

Our research with the City of Vancouver on the impact of free transit access on low-income communities revealed the extremely beneficial impact of unlimited transit access on families in poverty. We also heard much about the impact of free transit access for low-income and at-risk youth – that it is indeed a lifeline to shelter, food security, services, safety, and well-being.

Transit for teens is a solution – a solution for at-risk youth, a solution for congestion and climate change, a solution for mobility poverty, and transportation access for all families; it is a solution that BC needs now.

We have an opportunity to ensure every youth can access school every day while building a new generation of sustainable transportation users for life.

**We recommend free transit for all youth in BC through the extension of the Get on Board program up to age 18.**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to deliver this presentation and bring our three recommendations to you today.