BC POVERTY REDUCTION coalition

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A POVERTY FREE BC

IF YOUR MLA IS LIBERAL

This fact sheet is designed to assist you
when you contact your local Liberal MLA.

Meeting Goals:

- to start/build a relationship with your local MLA
- to present yourself as an accessible and knowledgeable resource
- to let them know that their constituents are expecting an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan and want the government to work together on this

Start by telling them that we urgently need all of government pushing for an accountable, bold and comprehensive plan. Almost 1 in 8 British Columbians live in poverty (12%).[1] 4 people are dying every day in BC due to the opioid epidemic that the Provincial Health Officer of BC has declared a Public Health Emergency. Many more are sick from poverty with cancer, heart disease, diabetes, depression and other health issues; and all British Columbians' health is worse from living in such an unequal society. Encourage them to read the *What We Heard About Poverty in BC* reports[2] and to recognize the need to address the issues raised in them.

Facts are great but connecting on a personal level is even better so try:

- **Telling a personal story of how poverty impacts you**, your family, your community or the people you work with – highlight the root causes of the issues: low income, lack of affordable housing and childcare, etc. *If you work with people in poverty, provide practical and other supports to have them come to the meeting and share what they want to see in a poverty reduction plan.*

- **Sharing what you value most about your community and your concerns,** and ask them to do the same: connect the need for a poverty reduction plan to their concerns.

Ask them to push for an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan for BC.

Talk through the policy brief with them and leave a few copies: "An Effective Poverty Reduction Plan: It's as simple as ABC" at http://www.abcplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Policy-Brief.pdf

Here are some things your MLA might say and ways you can respond:

Your MLA might say: "We can't afford a plan like this"

- **We all pay for poverty. A poverty reduction plan makes economic sense.** Considering the costs of health care, crime, and lost economic activity, we are spending between $8-9 billion per year

[1] Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type
[2] Province of British Columbia https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/read-public-and-stakeholder-input/

to maintain the status quo of poverty. An accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan would cost far less. Poverty is consistently linked to poor health, lower literacy, poor school performance for children, more crime, and greater stress for family members.

Your MLA might say "the best way to address child poverty is by creating jobs for their parents."

- **Poverty in BC is primarily about the "working poor."** Contrary to popular belief, only about 3% of the population in BC is on welfare or disability benefits, whereas the overall poverty rate is 12%. The current minimum wage of $12.65 will not allow workers to escape poverty while $15 an hour, if implemented immediately, would bring workers above the poverty line. Mainstream economists' opinion has shifted toward the conclusion that increases in minimum wages do not lead to loss of jobs. We also need to better enforce employment standards.

- **Some people can't work and for those who can the welfare system does not encourage transition to employment.** Welfare rates are deeply inadequate at $710 for a single "employable" person. This doesn't even cover basic needs such as a home (the average rent of a room in a boarding house in the Downtown Eastside is $687) and food (a healthy diet costs, on average, $225/month), let alone looking for a job. These rates were frozen from 2007-2017 so inflation has eaten away at what was already a subsistence income. To raise income and disability assistance rates to the poverty line, it would cost $1.16 billion, only 2% of the provincial budget.

Your MLA might say "will the taxpayer approve of tax hikes to pay for this plan?"

- **Most British Columbians would be willing to pay higher taxes to support policies that improve quality of life.**[3] Furthermore, income inequality in BC is drastically increasing. Between 2005 and 2015, employment incomes for the lowest fifth of income earners in B.C. dropped by 7.5 per cent, while incomes for the top fifth increased by 7.4%. Unequal societies have more health and social problems for everyone. That increasingly wealthy fifth of the population can afford to pay new taxes to increase the health of our society, to address poverty, and benefit us all.

Your MLA might say "this is another NDP promise that they can't keep."

- **We're depending on all of government to work together to make sure we implement an accountable, bold, and comprehensive poverty reduction plan.** We took great hope from the fact that your party embraced the call for a poverty reduction plan in your 2017 throne speech. I hope that people in poverty can depend on you to push the government to do the right thing.

End with a concrete action: invite them to an event or request a follow-up meeting.

Before you go, please let us know when you have a meeting scheduled with your MLA and, afterwards, let us know how it went. Email us at info@bcpovertyreduction.ca – thank you!

More information at bcpovertyreduction.ca

[3] Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives https://www.policyalternatives.ca/bc-tax-opinion