BC POVERTY REDUCTION coalition

WORKING TOGETHER FOR A POVERTY FREE BC

IF YOUR MLA IS NDP

This fact sheet is designed to assist you
when you contact your local NDP 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 thanking your MLA for their long-time commitment to a poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines, and for including the voices of low-income people in the development of the plan. Encourage them to read the *What We Heard About Poverty in BC* reports[1] and to recognize the need to address the issues raised in them. Explain that if you're going to ask low-income people to help develop an effective plan, you have a responsibility to implement it.

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 "Our government is taking bold steps to increase affordability for British Columbians." They may share a variety of policies including creating child care spaces and eliminating MSP premiums.

- These are all great steps and thank you for taking them. However, one-off policies without targets and timelines or specific objectives are not a plan and are not enough to address poverty. **We need an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan.**

[1] Province of British Columbia https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/read-public-and-stakeholder-input/

Your MLA might say "Minister Simpson and his Advisory Forum are working very hard on legislation for the fall, so that we can implement a poverty reduction plan in the Spring." For particular issues, they may defer to other bodies they've set up such as the Rental Housing Task Force or the Fair Wages Commission.

- **Poverty is a complex problem that requires all Ministries to work together.** The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction cannot implement an effective poverty reduction plan alone. On page 40 of the *What We Heard* report, participants "called for action to break down silos and for greater transparency across government." The over-arching vision and first steps for this poverty reduction plan matter, and we need your help to make sure that the whole government is working together on implementing a truly effective cross-ministry plan.

Your MLA might say "the first thing we did upon taking office was raise welfare and disability rates by $100; we cannot afford to raise the rates as high as you propose"

- Page 26 of the *What We Heard* report states that "**We heard from individuals and organizations in every part of the province that current income assistance rates do not address the needs of people in poverty.**" At $710 for a single "employable" person, welfare rates don'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). To raise income and disability assistance rates to the poverty line, it would cost $1.16 billion, only 2% of the provincial budget.
- According to Carnegie Community Action Project's 2017 *Hotel Survey and Housing Report*, the increase in average rents in a boarding house in the Downtown Eastside was $139 over last year's rate—wiping out the $100 increase in welfare rates. **Without rent control tied to the unit, many of the government's policy changes will not have the beneficial impact expected or hoped for.**

Your MLA might say "if we implement rent control to the unit, it will discourage developers from building and/or maintaining rental housing."

- **This form of rent control is not new to BC.** Part of the *1974 Landlord and Tenant Act* limited rent increases to once every twelve months, regardless of whether a change in tenant or landlord had occurred. In place from 1974 to 1984, with cross-party political support in response to a 0.5% vacancy rate, there was no discernible impact on new rental housing or increased neglect of buildings. Rent control has the potential to maintain the diversity of our neighbourhoods rather than making a growing number only available to those that can afford them, displacing everyone else and leaving our communities lacking. Page 21 of the *What We Heard* report highlights that "there was widespread support from participants for rent control linked to units, so landlords cannot dramatically increase rent when tenants change, or when income and disability assistance rates increase."

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