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Opposition propose BC Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act: Now is the time for bi-partisan collaboration in addressing the root causes of poverty

(British Columbia) Today in the BC Legislature, the Official Opposition (MLA Michelle Mungall) introduced a private member's Bill proposing a BC Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act. The Act, were it to be enacted, would see the government develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy within one year, and legislate specific targets and timelines to reduce the breadth and depth of poverty.

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (BCPRC) welcomes this Bill, as British Columbia has had the highest poverty rate in Canada for the last 13 years, yet is now one of only two provinces left without a poverty reduction plan.

Importantly, the proposed Act includes extensive community consultation, including with those living in poverty, and also outlines how a government should be held accountable for progress. It commits to embed targets in legislation, to appoint a lead Minister, to have a cabinet committee to oversee the strategy co-chaired by the Premier, to have an outside advisory committee to hold the government to account, and to annual reporting to monitor progress.

"After years of building support throughout the province for a poverty reduction plan for BC, it is gratifying to see the Opposition signal a strong commitment" says Seth Klein, Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-BC Office and co-chair of the BCPRC.

"However, I hope to hear more from the Opposition about what their first steps would be, as we know the urgency of initial actions and these don't need to wait for the development of a full strategy, such as raising inadequate welfare rates that have been frozen since 2007."

Ted Bruce of the Public Health Association of BC and co-chair of the BCPRC notes the significance of the guiding principles of the Act to protect human rights, address the social and economic costs of poverty, and address the social determinants of health.

"We know that the costs of health care alone in relation to poverty are 1.2 billion dollars per year. Tackling poverty upfront is the single biggest factor in improving health outcomes for everyone, not just those living in poverty."

The BCPRC urges all parties to support the Act, as has happened in other provinces across Canada. Now is the time for bi-partisan collaboration and action in addressing the root causes of poverty.

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For interviews with Seth Klein, Ted Bruce or Trish Garner, Community Organizer, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, contact:

Trish Garner

Work: 604-801-5121 x241

Cell: 604-417-8885

Email: trish@bcpovertyreduction.ca