

The Honourable Christy Clark

Premier of British Columbia
Box 9041, Station PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Christy Clark,

I am distressed by the levels of poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. At 11 percent, BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada. Yet BC is one of only two provinces left without a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. Where is BC's poverty reduction plan?

We know that all of us pay for poverty. We pay in increased health care costs. We pay in higher crime. And we pay in lack of school readiness, reduced school success and in lower economic productivity. In fact, **the total cost of poverty in BC is \$8-9 billion per year, while a comprehensive, preventative poverty reduction plan would cost just half that at \$3-4 billion per year. There is a false economy in failing to act boldly.**

Health impacts of poverty directly affect 15% of the BC population. The poorest 20% when compared to the richest 20% have a 60% greater rate of two or more chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, respiratory diseases and mental illness. **Poor health and poverty go hand-in-hand. But high levels of inequality negatively affect the health of all of us through the breakdown of social cohesion.**

You have an opportunity before you to take strong and meaningful action on this issue and I urge you to support **Bill M212: The Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act**. In particular, I call upon the province to commit to targets and timelines to end poverty, and specific policy measures and concrete actions in each of the following areas:

- Raise welfare and disability rates, which have been frozen at \$610 and \$906 per month respectively since 2007, and index them to inflation.
- Increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation, and improve the working conditions of those earning low income.
- Re-commit to building thousands of new social housing units per year.
- Adopt the \$10/day child care plan.
- Provide essential health care services, like dental and optical.
- Adequately fund schools and make post-secondary education and training more accessible.
- Address the structural barriers faced by marginalized groups.

These issues are a matter of life and death for thousands of people around the province. We need to tackle them immediately in order to protect the most vulnerable people from the devastating impacts of poverty and the long term effects as they are passed on to the next generation.

I know that you share this sense of urgency with us and I look forward to the government committing to a poverty reduction strategy in the near future.

Thank you,

Name & signature