

IF YOUR MLA IS GREEN

This fact sheet is designed to assist you when you contact your local Green Party 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 support their commitment to tackle poverty 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, including increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and implementing the \$10 a day child care plan. BC has been the only province without a comprehensive poverty reduction plan for many years so it's exciting to have all-party support for strong and meaningful action on this issue.

They might bring up other positive measures, such as eliminating MSP and investing more in education, including restoring Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning funding. If so, congratulate them on those good policy changes.

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 those folks come to the meeting and share their stories.*
- **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.

Reference the NDP-Green Agreement and the focus within the poverty reduction strategy on addressing the real causes of homelessness. Highlight that the primary cause is low welfare rates (\$610) so the priority action needed is increasing income assistance rates to \$1500 (in line with Statistics Canada's Market Basket Measure, which includes "a nutritious diet, clothing and footwear, shelter, transportation, and other necessary goods and services (such as personal care items or household supplies)"¹). Congratulate them on their commitment to a more substantial long-term increase to welfare rates than the NDP promise of \$100 and encourage them to push the NDP further on this issue.

¹ Statistics Canada CANSIM Table 206-0093: Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds (2011 base) for reference family, by Market Basket Measure region and component, in current dollars and 2015 constant dollars, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&retrLang=eng&id=2060093&&pattern=&stByVal=1&p1=1&p2=31&tabMode=dataTable&csid=>

Investing in social housing is also critical. Otherwise, any increases in incomes (as well as the renters rebate) will go to landlords rather than those struggling to pay their rent. The current need is 10,000 social housing units per year in BC. Thank your MLA for their commitment to build 4,000 social housing units per year and encourage them to increase this investment. Let them know that the NDP's renters rebate would be better invested in social housing.

They may also bring up their promise to implement a basic income pilot to tackle poverty. However, while it has the advantage of reducing the stigma and bureaucracy of accessing welfare, it must at least meet the Market Basket Measure and be complemented by a strong minimum wage (so as not to subsidize low-wage employers) and substantial public investments in housing, healthcare, childcare and education.

If there are opportunities in the conversation, use some other facts about poverty:

- **Almost 1 in 7 British Columbians live in poverty (15%), now the highest poverty rate in Canada.**
- **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 to maintain the status quo of poverty. That's more than double the \$3-4 billion needed to implement a comprehensive poverty reduction plan. Poverty is consistently linked to poor health, lower literacy, poor school performance for children, more crime, and greater stress for family members.

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