

**KAIROS Parksville/Qualicum Beach**  
888, Temple St, Parksville

**Submission to BC Poverty Reduction Forum**

**March 21, 2018**

**PQB KAIROS** is a member of **KAIROS Canada**, an interfaith movement for ecological justice and human rights, and whose individual members are active in the local community. Some members participated in the **BC Poverty Reduction Consultations** held in January in Nanaimo and Port Alberni.

**This Submission** reflects our collective thinking and recommendations.

**Signatories:** Eva Hilborn, Beulah Paugh, Perry Perry, Norma Emerson, Barb Paterson, Kathy Miller, Michael Jessen, MaryLynn French, Jo Jamieson, Catherine Watson, Yvonne Zarowny, Graham Riches.

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## **Human rights principles**

We strongly believe that BC's Poverty Reduction Plan and its enabling legislation, policies and programs should be grounded in a human rights framework recognizing:

- poverty reduction is about meeting basic human needs which fundamentally are matters of human rights and human dignity. Like water and air these rights are inherent e.g., the right to food, clothing and shelter, and to an adequate standard of living and employment...
- such rights also derive from universally agreed international law which has been ratified by Canada and BC including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1976)* with cross cutting rights to the *ICCPR, CRC, CEDAW, CRPD, UNDRIP* .....
- significantly the ratification of these international conventions obliges the governments of Canada and BC to act as the '*primary duty bearer*' for addressing poverty reduction and adopting policies which '*respect, protect and fulfill*' the rights to food, clothing, shelter; health, education and social protection. Government is publicly accountable.

## **Reclaiming public policy from the parallel charity economy**

Since the early 2000s the BC government under the pretext of economic growth and lower taxes has increasingly downloaded its responsibilities for addressing a wide range of poverty issues (e.g., hunger, homelessness, joblessness, mental ill health) to an under resourced yet growing charity economy. However, our view is that

- charity is never a right: food bank hand outs are shaming and ineffective;
- charity without rights acts as a moral safety valve - the public believing the problem solved while the BC government has looked the other way;
- today's social services are increasingly privatized e.g., since the Greater Vancouver Food Bank's founding (1982) hunger in BC (and Canada) is now accepted as a matter for corporate food charity imported from the USA;
- BC's social safety net is broken. Publicly funded financial assistance has been transformed into a charitable but ineffective food safety net;
- the point is a right (to food or housing) is not a right unless it can be claimed by all citizens.

## **Primary causes of hunger and homelessness**

It is clear to us that the causes of poverty (and inequality) are well known yet have been neglected by the previous government. They include

- inadequate incomes – low wages, precarious work and sub-poverty income assistance leading to hunger, homelessness, mental illness, social exclusion..;
- unfair income distribution – always lower taxes and regressive taxation;
- harsh welfare eligibility criteria; unhelpful work and welfare bureaucracies with complex on-line applications;
- such issues are compounded in rural and small town BC with its lack of public transportation to access services and appointments;
- the outsourcing of basic human needs to charity and under funded and resourced advocacy agencies (e.g., legal aid, citizens advisory bodies);
- disconnected public policy ministries - Work BC, Social Development, Public Health, Housing and political neglect of evidenced based policy making;
- long standing violations of international human rights obligations (*see ICESCR, CRC, CRPD, CEDAW, UNDRIP*) to ‘respect, protect and fulfill’ the right to food, clothing and shelter and adequate standard of living

### **Our poverty reduction recommendations**

- Adopt Human Rights Based Approaches with the preambles to all poverty reduction legislation to reference international conventions (e.g., *ICESCR, CRC*) as symbolic and permanent reminders to the BC Government of its moral and legal obligations as the ‘*primary duty bearer*’ under international law;
- Pay particular attention to poverty reduction amongst First Nations peoples and to rural and small town BC focusing on affordable housing, rent controls, dignified food access through adequate incomes and benefits plus the necessary public transportation to access services and appointments;
- Guarantee Living Wages for all working people (and required of all levels of government). The consequence of not doing so results in financial drain to provincial coffers dealing with a wide range of poverty related issues (mental health, learning problems for children; homelessness; food insecurity; physical well being; crime etc);
- Guarantee adequate income assistance and related benefits indexed annually to the **real** cost of living (see BC Dieticians) to be entrenched in legislation, that are not arbitrary, politically opportune pre-election ‘increases’;
- Maintain strong support for the newly restored BC Human Rights Commission backed by a province wide publicly funded and accountable infrastructure of accessible services such as welfare appeal tribunals and citizen advice bureaus with trained advisors (professionals and volunteers) ensuring full take-up of eligible but unclaimed financial assistance/social security benefits;

- Explore Basic Income in BC ensuring implementation will not subsidize low wage work; and that Basic Universal and Essential Services – e.g., education, health, public housing, income security, disability services and social programs - will not be cut but further enhanced and developed;
- Ensure access to affordable housing and to rent controls
- Invest in the future of children and young people and with attention to rural poverty - see also *Rural Women Survey 2018* CFUW\*
  - low cost Quality Universal Early Childhood Program ensuring better language and social skills when entering formal education, and reducing need for Special Education thereby addressing mental health issue early in a child's development, and single mothers needs in the workforce
  - affordable child care
  - fully funded provincial universal school meal program (so teachers no longer personally have to feed children) and community meal programs
  - affordable post-secondary education for good jobs
- Apply evidenced based policy making to inform the Poverty Reduction Plan including: targets; timelines; benchmarks/measures/clear indicators (see *Stats Can* data; *Canadian Community Health Survey* food insecurity measures) and introduce measures to chart the reduction of food bank usage and teachers feeding children;
- Connect the dots: 'joined-up' public policy: inter-ministerial oversight and accountability – Work BC, Social Development, Public Health, Housing, MCFD, with human rights training for all civil servants in these ministries;
- Introduce and ensure a strong commitment to pro-poor progressive taxation and by curbing tax evasion and money laundering;

## Conclusion

PQB KAIROS strongly believes that a successful BC Poverty Reduction Plan will depend on the BC Government meeting its moral, legal and political obligations under international law as the 'primary duty bearer' and by changing the poverty debate and necessary actions from charity to public policy informed by human rights.

March 21, 2018

\* see also Executive Summary, *Rural Women Survey 2018* Canadian Federation of University Women [Executive Summary-Rural Wo~1.pdf \(358 KB\)](#)[Open as Web Page]