



Kamloops and District Labour Council
PO Box 369 Stn Main
Kamloops, BC
V2C 5K9

January 4, 2018

Dear Premier John Horgan,

As the holiday season draws to a close, many of us are left with fond memories of the good times we had with our families and friends; the festivities, good food, gifts, and traditions. For others, the holiday season is a stark reminder that they cannot afford festivities and feasts, or even to meet the basic needs of their families. Let's face it, staring into an empty refrigerator is not fun and doesn't evoke happy memories for anyone. As you know, BC has highest rate of poverty and child poverty in Canada, yet is the only province without a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Plan.

At the December meeting of the Kamloops and District Labour Council (KDLC), delegates voted in favour of making cash donations to several food banks in our region – with the proviso that we also do whatever we can to help change the system that maintains poverty.

While we appreciate the hard work being done by food bank workers and volunteers as they strive to meet the ever-expanding needs in our communities, we are saddened that receiving charity has become a “holiday tradition” for so many Canadian families. The KDLC firmly believes that charity undermines individuals' dignity and autonomy and maintains social hierarchies and inequality.

Accordingly, we are urging the BC NDP government to implement a strong poverty reduction strategy with a cross-ministerial focus, strict timelines and legislated targets. In order to achieve these targets, we call upon the province to commit to specific policy measures and concrete actions in each of the following policy areas:

1. Provide adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed, and remove policy barriers so that recipients can build and maintain assets – including increasing welfare and disability rates to the Market Basket Measure and indexing them to the cost of living, and removing the arbitrary barriers that discourage, delay and deny people in need;
2. Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce – including increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by January 2019 and restoring the coverage and enforcement of employment standards;
3. Address the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty – including restructuring federal and provincial funding to better address the needs of all Aboriginal people, including the large off-reserve population;

4. Address homelessness and adopt a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan - including bringing on stream 10,000 new units of social and co-op housing per year;
5. Provide universal publicly-funded child care - including adopting the \$10 a day child care plan produced by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC;
6. Enhance support for training and education for low-income people – including reducing tuition fees by 50% and increasing the availability of post-secondary grants for low-income students.
7. Enhance community mental health and home support services and expand integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services – including expanding essential health services in the public system such as dental and optical care and community mental health services.

The existence of poverty in Canada is a violation of human rights. We not only have a moral duty to eradicate poverty, but also a legal obligation under international human rights law.

There is also a false economy in failing to act boldly. According to the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition (http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2013_prc_5-things-to-know.pdf), maintaining poverty costs between \$8 and \$9 billion per year as compared to a comprehensive poverty reduction plan, which would cost between \$3-4 billion per year when fully implemented.

We know that paying for the negative effects of poverty costs much more than dealing with it directly and that it is costing far more for us to turn our backs on families and children living in poverty than it ever would to help lift them out of poverty. The KDLC advocates for education and training, good jobs that pay a living wage, affordable and accessible child care, decent affordable housing, adequate public transportation, strong public health care, and universal Pharmacare for all citizens. We stand behind a progressive government that assumes responsibility for the needs of its citizens rather than placing the burden of poverty on charitable organizations. Now is the time for collaboration and action in addressing the root causes of poverty.

Sincerely,
Barb Nederpel
President, Kamloops and District Labour Council

cc: Shane Simpson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
Mable Elmore, Parliamentary Secretary for Poverty Reduction