

March 23, 2018

Dear Minister Simpson,

Livable Income Vancouver is a group of individuals who have come together to advocate for a Guaranteed Livable Income (GLI), a form of income guarantee that is universal, individual, unconditional, and livable. We believe a GLI can promote the greatest autonomy, economic security, wellbeing, and equality for residents of B.C. As such, this proposal, along with robust public programs and a livable minimum wage, has the potential to have the greatest impact on reducing poverty in B.C.

Members of Livable Income Vancouver have participated in several poverty reduction consultation meetings. Our members come from a variety of experiences including work in transition houses, rape crisis centers, in the health field with the social determinants of health, in housing activism, with youth, with anti-poverty organizations, and in social movements organizing against inequality of sex, race, and class. Our collective experiences reveal considerable understanding of the conditions of poverty in B.C., including direct experience with the unequal conditions that push people into poverty and often keep them there. We also have direct experience with our current inadequate provincial systems designed to respond to poverty, including the income assistance system, the foster care and child apprehension system, the health system, and housing supports and provisions. We see Guaranteed Livable Income combined with a livable minimum wage and robust public programs, such as public transportation, healthcare, education, and childcare, as the strongest response this government can make to poverty.

Our current income system is broken. As the provincial commission noted, income assistance rates are well below poverty levels. Although the income assistance bureaucracy has policed the behaviour and wellbeing of impoverished people in every iteration, its current form is exceptionally policing, punishing, and deterring. In our experience, people face so many barriers to accessing income assistance, in addition to harmfully low rates, the income assistance bureaucracy does not currently act as a floor to protect people from poverty. Rather, it renders them destitute. Further, a growing number of jobs pay only minimum wage, which is inadequate to meet the cost of living. This means that a large and growing proportion of the wage-earning workforce faces poverty even while working.

There is inequality in our current income system. Not everyone experiences the impacts of low income assistance rates and low wages equally. The impacts of income assistance and minimum wage work are faced disproportionately by women, people of colour, recent immigrants, refugees, Indigenous people, disabled people, and youth ageing out of care. Further, these groups disproportionately face discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, low-pay, and unfair conditions at work. Currently the work of caring for others falls disproportionately to women either without pay or with low-pay, contributing to women's overall high rates of poverty. Finally, the impacts of male violence in the home are faced almost exclusively by women and their children. As a result of the combined impacts of low income

assistance rates, low wages, the sexual division of labour, and sexual harassment in the workplace, women often depend on men's income. The inequality in our current income system makes it easier for men to use money as a form of coercive control, and even more so if women also face race and class inequality.

There is insecurity in our current income system. We support campaigns for a stronger minimum wage, broader unionization, full employee benefits, and better working conditions. However, these will never be enough because full employment is a myth. Through disability, illness, or the need to care for someone else, any of us can be pushed out of the workforce. Youth ageing out of care often have few resources and little security to draw on as they establish their adult lives. As a result of sex, race, and class inequality, many people are facing lives of diminished autonomy and self-determination. Stress from income insecurity, inequality, and lack of autonomy has been shown to negatively impact health and wellbeing.

For all these reasons, a Guaranteed Livable Income, along with robust public programs and a livable minimum wage, is a necessary step to ensuring fairness and ending poverty in B.C.

Livable Income Vancouver advocates a form of GLI that supports autonomy, security, equality and well-being. This means a GLI that is:

- **Universal:** It goes to every adult resident with a partial share for each child.
- **Unconditional:** It is given without imposing a work requirement, a means test, or any other condition.
- **Livable:** It is set at a rate that allows security and dignity. It meets the market basket measure plus allows for discretionary spending, savings, and full participation in community life.
- **Individual:** It goes to each adult member of a household, regardless of relationship status.
- **No One Worse Off:** It does not leave anyone in a worse situation. All other public programs, such as public transportation, healthcare, education, and childcare, are also robustly sustained. Additionally, no income program is cut until we are assured that no one is worse off.
- **For Residents:** It is available to every person eligible to work in Canada and their dependents, regardless of their citizenship status.
- **For Refugees:** It is available to all refugees undergoing a claim process.
- **Publicly Funded:** It is funded by government through tax revenue.

Support for an income guarantee is growing nationally and internationally. A current pilot program in Ontario and a past experiment in Manitoba are two examples from Canada alone. There is also a groundswell of popular support, including that which is evident in B.C.'s poverty reduction consultations. While the growth of support for the idea of an income guarantee is heartening, there are also problems with current pilot programs (Ontario) and implementations (Quebec). These are not universal programs. Further, they do not yet offer an income that meets the Low-Income Cut Off, a commonly used measure approximating the "poverty line" in Canada. As such, these are not experiments in GLI, but rather in more generous welfare

programs. While certainly many people living on income assistance would benefit from a more generous income each month, a true GLI is not an act of generosity, but a right. Further, a true GLI offers the potential of fixing our broken income system, reducing the impacts of inequality, and providing security for those with jobs as well as those without. Programs that only “top up” current income assistance rates and low-wages without offering true livability are dangerous. They continue to single out a small group of people as deserving of help, while rejecting others. Additionally, they mark a small group in society as needing help while offering the impression that others do not “take” from the system, even when our tax system offers many cash transfers to wealthier individuals and households. Finally, they are likely to suppress wages as employers now benefit from public subsidy and face less public pressure to raise wages.

We know that the government in B.C. has committed funds to modeling an income guarantee in B.C. We also know that modeling efforts will look to the examples of Ontario and Quebec. We urge you not to follow the models of Ontario and Quebec, but rather to implement a full GLI as outlined above to promote the greatest autonomy, economic security, wellbeing, and equality for residents of B.C.

In conclusion, success in reducing poverty means addressing the systemic issues that push people into poverty and very often keep them there. Our income system is broken, not only because it offers punishingly low incomes, whether through income assistance or minimum wage work, but also because the conditions through which it operates are fundamentally unfair. We will only succeed at reducing poverty when we implement changes that address all the following: low income assistance rates; a policing and deterring income assistance bureaucracy; low-wages; a predominance of low-wage work; and the need for alternatives to work due to discrimination, harassment, disability, illness, and care-work responsibilities. Only with implementation of a GLI, along with robust public programs and a livable minimum wage, will we achieve these goals.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Piovesan
On behalf of the Members, Livable Income Vancouver
livableincomeforequality@gmail.com