

October 16, 2017

To the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services:

RE: 2018 Budget Submission

We are writing to you on behalf of the City of Vancouver Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee. We are a citizen advisory body that reports to Vancouver City Council on issues that relate to children, youth and families. The Committee is made up of individuals under the age of 14, 15 to 21 and 22 and over. In July, the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee unanimously carried a motion indicating that we would write to the Standing Committee on the following subjects.

K-12 Public Education

The Committee cares deeply about K-12 public education and has written to local MLAs and to the Standing Committee on several occasions. Given the recent Supreme Court Ruling in favour of the BCTF on class size and composition, we believe that the Province must provide timely support for students and teachers. More needs to be done to attract and retain teachers not only in Vancouver, but across the Province in order to meet adequate staffing requirements. In 2016, Committee Members in partnership with local students met with multiple Vancouver MLAs to discuss their concerns regarding public education. They discussed issues related to the inability to sign up for certain classes because they were full and class size issues in arts classes (band, strings, and choir). Students also discussed the need for more mental health services in their schools and community. We are also encouraging the Province to support parents, students and teachers by providing additional resources to School Districts to aid in the early diagnosis of learning disabilities in order for all students to receive the necessary supports at school.

We encourage the Province to expedite funding for seismic upgrade projects. The previous government's decision to move the deadline to upgrade all schools from 2020 to 2030 is simply unacceptable and we challenge this government to do better. We also hope that new schools get built in Coal Harbour, Olympic Village, the River District (East Fraser Lands), and along the Cambie Corridor to meet the needs of these growing communities. The Committee also encourages the Province to look at right-sizing schools whenever possible in order to build new, state of the art educational facilities for local students and for many generations to come.

Housing and Housing Affordability

The Committee has deep concerns about the limited supply of appropriate, affordable housing in Vancouver, for all residents but particularly, for families. The livability is limited to small spaces and little green space, which research has shown is vital to a healthy growth and childhood development. Prices of both rental housing and homeownership keep on rising, farther out of reach of more and more families in our city, and driving families out of the city, or forcing them to live in inadequate homes. Cities need to be hospitable to all age groups to be viable and we call on the Provincial government to work with the city toward making Vancouver known as a family friendly city.

Poverty Reduction

British Columbia is Canada's laggard with respect to poverty reduction. Our Committee members are very concerned about this matter, especially the dismal child poverty rate. According to the most recent Campaign 2000/First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition report one in five BC children are poor and this is unacceptable.

To quote the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition:

"All other provinces either have poverty reduction plans or are in the process of adopting them and now is the time for BC to develop its plan.

...There is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. Other jurisdictions that are setting clear targets are getting results. A comprehensive approach needs to boost the incomes of those living in poverty, but also build the social infrastructure, public services and assets that are vital to providing a path out of poverty and improving quality of life. If we commit to a bold plan, a dramatic reduction in poverty and homelessness within a few short years is perfectly achievable."

We agree with the Poverty Reduction Coalition and stand with First Call's recommendation that the plan contain a goal to reduce BC's child poverty rate to 7% or lower by 2020. Most recent reports state that BC's child poverty rate of 19.8% is higher than the poverty rate of 16% for all ages and that children under 6 have an even higher poverty rate of 20.1%.

Child Care

Child care fees are the second-largest expense for most young families after housing.

BC's families with young children need access to affordable high quality and inclusive child care not only because most parents are in the paid labour force and access to child care supports their financial viability but because it is a key to ending family poverty. Also, international research clearly shows that a high-quality early care and learning system has quantifiable long-term benefits for child development.

Our Committee has previously expressed support for the "Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning", commonly branded as the "\$10/day Child Care Plan".

While achieving a universally accessible high-quality child care system takes time, there are short term actions that can and should be taken immediately.

We therefore urge the Provincial Government to deliver tangible benefits to families by reducing parent fees in all licensed programs. This can be done with minimal administrative cost by increasing the existing Child Care Operating Grant currently received by licensed family child care homes, full-day centres and part day preschools. The government has already committed to slowly increasing the number of licensed spaces. Developing a concurrent workforce strategy is essential and should include raising Early Childhood Educator wages, education levels and opportunities.

Youth Aging out of Foster Care

Children and youth in foster care and transitioning into adulthood are some of the most vulnerable youth in our society, cut off from supports most of us can expect to rely on well into our twenties. Our committee asks the Provincial government to extend both financial support and the support of dependable adults to all youth aging out of foster care until the age of 25.

Youth Mental Health and Healthcare

The Committee is concerned about mental health treatment options for local youth. We believe that young people deserve access to adequate and timely care. Vancouver Coastal Health provides some counselling services in local schools for high school students, but more can be done to serve this community. We hope that there can be more services to meet youth in the spaces where they feel most comfortable in order to get the care that they need. In general, the Committee is also seeking improvements to Community Health Care Centres, emergency room efficiency and more services to combat the opioid crisis and substance use addiction.

We hope that our feedback is included in the upcoming budget. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you have any questions or concerns.

Best regards,



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Approval of Minutes

MOVED by Christy Lo
SECONDED by Mab Oloman

THAT the minutes of the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee meeting held on May 11, 2017, be approved.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

1. Millennium Line Extension Presentation

Steve Brown, Manager, Rapid Transit Office, and Sara Rocchi, Project Manager, Translink provided an update on the Millennium Line Broadway Extension Project, and responded to questions.

2. Single Use Disposable Items Presentation - WITHDRAWN

3. Establishing Priorities for the Committee's Submission to the Provincial Government's Select Standing Committee for Finance and Government Services

MOVED by Mab Oloman
SECONDED by Emma Fineblit

THAT the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee provide a submission to the Provincial Government's Select Standing Committee for Finance and Government Services, outlining their priorities regarding government services for children, youth and families.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

The committee discussed the following topics that may be included in their submission:

- housing and housing affordability;
- labour laws and employment standards;
- education;
- youth aging out of foster care;
- childcare;
- poverty reduction plan;
- emergency room efficiency;
- community health care centres;
- youth mental health;
- substance user addiction.