

October 16, 2018

The Honourable Carole James
Minister of Finance
Parliament Buildings, Victoria
British Columbia
V8V 1X4

Dear Minister James:

Re: 2019 Provincial Budget Consultation

I am writing on behalf of the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. (SPARC BC), which has a 50-year history of working with people and communities throughout the province on social policy issues. Attached are three evidence-based policy reports produced by SPARC BC – *BC's Child Poverty Report Card*, *BC's Seniors' Poverty Report Card*, and a recent *Homelessness Policy Brief*. Each of these reports reinforces the importance of focusing on initiatives to improve social inclusion and promote greater fairness for all British Columbians.

As the primary provider of handicapped parking permits for seniors and people with disabilities – we issue over 50,000 permits per year – SPARC BC has gained important insight into the challenges and barriers that many people with disabilities face. We believe that there is both the need for on-going investments in the physical and social infrastructure of communities to allow for greater access to opportunities as well as the need for policies that provide for greater equity and fairness for people with disabilities.

Poverty reduction remains a high priority for British Columbia. Working with *First Call* we know that the child poverty rate in B.C. is far too high and that too many families and children have been excluded from the opportunities that should be available to all. Similarly, our recent *Seniors' Poverty Report Card* shows a growing number of seniors living below the poverty line. An effective poverty reduction strategy for B.C. must address these issues and seek to meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable.

SPARC BC also believes in the importance of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Through our work with First Nations communities we have seen first-hand the devastating effect of Canada's history and relationship with Indigenous peoples. We encourage all levels of government to continue building new pathways forward - pathways that recognize the rights of Indigenous peoples for self-determination and that seek to acknowledge and address past harms. To this end, we are pleased that the Budget Consultation document has emphasized the government's commitment to work toward true and lasting reconciliation.

While each of the policy areas highlighted in the Budget Consultation document are important, to significantly address poverty there must be further increases to income assistance rates. Specifically, the frozen welfare rates over the past decade have placed an unbearable burden on those who have no choice but to rely on income assistance and who have seen their purchasing power steadily decline. Furthermore, while we recognize that this type of policy change requires significant resources we also know that it can make a critical difference in the lives of the families and individuals who rely on this support.

In closing, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our research and to speak to the importance of ensuring that British Columbia is a province where everyone is given a chance to realize their full potential.

Sincerely,



Hugh Kellas
President, SPARC BC

Attachments:

BC Child Poverty Report Card
BC Seniors' Poverty Report Card
Homelessness Policy Brief