

October 8, 2020

Dan Howe
President and CEO
Special Olympics British Columbia
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Email: dhowe@specialolympics.bc.ca

Dear Dan Howe,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Special Olympics British Columbia. The issues your organization has raised and your advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities are much appreciated by the BC New Democratic Party and we are pleased to respond.

Our BC NDP government has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to making life better for people living with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities: our government is providing Community Living BC (CLBC) with \$1.14 billion in 2020-21, a \$75 million increase from 2019-20 for services that directly support people with developmental disabilities so they can meet their personal goals and disability-related needs. After 10 years of no increases, our government increased funding for the CLBC Home Sharing program by \$45 million over three years. Home-sharing services are provided to more than 4,200 people in B.C. as one of CLBC's residential services. Additionally, the B.C. Initiative for Inclusive Post-Secondary Education, under Steps Forward, ensures students with developmental disabilities can access post-secondary education and supports people on multiple campuses throughout B.C. with funding from CLBC.

When we became government, one of our key priorities was to update income and disability assistance policies to remove barriers and make it easier for people to get help when they need it most. We took action including increasing disability assistance rates by \$150 per month (for single individuals) and earnings exemptions for people on disability assistance to \$15,000 per year starting this coming January. These changes are a move away from the mean-spirited policies of the BC Liberals, reduce inequality and allow people to access essential services and keep them from falling further behind.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our government also distributed over \$35 million in emergency funding through CLBC to ensure people with developmental disabilities stay supported and safe during the pandemic including funding to support service providers to continue delivering residential services, including group homes, home sharing and supported independent living. We also provided additional support to families of children with extra support needs including autism through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. MCFD established a \$225/month Emergency Relief Support Fund for eligible families to help

alleviate caregiving demands and to support overall well-being. Eligible families, including those receiving support from the Autism Funding Program and the At Home Program, have also been able to use medical benefits to purchase equipment and supplies, family counselling or therapy and MCFD provided additional flexibility for children and youth in transition periods to have an extra three months to use their funding to purchase intervention services.

We know that there is much more that needs to be done, and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction is leading work across government to improve access for people with disabilities, including those living with intellectual disabilities. This work includes a consultation process that began in fall 2019 regarding new accessibility legislation which will lead to a culture shift toward greater inclusion and accessibility across the province and make B.C. a more welcoming place for people with disabilities.

In addition, following extensive consultation (including with self advocates and those with lived experience) we released the Reimagining Community Inclusion (RCI) report and established an implementation steering committee which began meeting in February 2020. It is comprised of representatives from BC People First, Community Living BC, Inclusion BC, Family Support Institute, BC Family Net, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society, BC CEO Network, Advocate for Service Quality, and Self Advocate Leadership Network. This committee will set goals and priorities and identify a collaborative approach for the implementation of the 10-year RCI Roadmap.

The disability legislation and Reimagining Community Inclusion consultations have provided government with valuable input from people with lived experience and their advocates to the policy-making process. This provides a good foundation that a re-elected BC NDP government will be able to build on, including through our RCI steering committee. In conjunction with this, and building on our record of investments, a BC NDP government will work to improve health conditions and outcomes of British Columbian citizens with intellectual disabilities, continue to improve their quality of life and reduce the inequality they face in health services and in their daily life.

Thank you for taking the time to write and for your advocacy on behalf of British Columbians with intellectual disabilities.

Sincerely,
BC NDP