



September 28, 2021

Sent by Email

BC Legislature

Victoria, BC

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

This is a submission to the above-noted Standing Committee from the **Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition (RPRC)**. We are writing today to impress upon the provincial government the gaps in services for people experiencing poverty, and our recommendations to fill those gaps with improved government processes and policy.

The RPRC is a not-for-profit society consisting of a *“coalition of Richmond residents and agencies working together to reduce poverty and the impacts of poverty with research, projects and public education.”*

The RPRC advocates for people experiencing poverty and provides self-advocacy and leadership skills to low-income residents. We provide access to information on local services and programs for disadvantaged groups. We connect homeless and at-risk individuals and families to services and resources they need. Finally, the RPRC regularly convenes a steering committee of local service agencies and anti-poverty advocates for information sharing and to eliminate duplication of services. For more details about our work, please see www.richmondprc.org.

Our steering committee discussed the following four (4) issues and are requesting the BC government address these inequities by establishing new processes and policy that will eliminate gaps in services for people experiencing poverty.

Housing

Richmond does not have enough non-market rental housing supply for the people who need it. This puts residents in situations where they must rely on unstable, market-driven rental accommodation. Much of the market supply consists of secondary suites (basement suites) in private homes, where tenants can be demovicted with little notice and nowhere else to go. This issue mainly affects disadvantaged groups such as seniors, families, newcomers, people with disabilities, and individuals on government income assistance.

In addition, the City of Richmond's *Affordable Housing Strategy* is dependent on developers to supply low-end market rentals (LEMR) to be rented at 10% below market. The market rate in Richmond is so out of sync with incomes, these units are only accessible to people of middle income.

The RPRC recommends the provincial government:

- Mandate that municipal governments prioritize the building of non-market housing until this type of housing stock meets the need of low-income residents, and that municipalities provide targets and timelines on how this will be accomplished.
- Mandate a government policy that states that rental units have rent attached to the unit, not the tenant. This means if a tenant leaves, the rent would not be increased beyond the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) yearly allowable increase.

Transportation

The RPRC commends the provincial government for introducing free transit for 0-12 years. This policy positively impacts families and allows them to travel freely to meet family obligations and get to community services as needed. However, there are still many low income individuals (ie. teens and people on income assistance) that would benefit by having free or sliding scale transit fares.

Additionally, Low-income people are often the target of transit violations and are given tickets that they cannot pay. The result is they cannot renew driving licenses or ICBC insurance. TransLink reports the administration of the transit fines program does not pay for itself. It would make more sense to introduce free or reduced fare transit for low-income people.

The RPRC recommends the provincial government:

- Introduce free transit for 12-18 years and sliding scale fares for low-income people.
- Withdraw the transit fines program.

Mental Health

COVID 19 has shown us that mental illness is more prevalent now than ever, and low-income populations are doubly vulnerable during the time of COVID. Mental health resources and supports are being stretched to the limit and people end up being shuffled from one service agency to another and give up in frustration.

The RPRC believes mental health services should be a right under BC's health care model. Current access to many mental health services is barriered with such impediments such as weekday office hours, weekend closures, doctor's certificates, and extra fees. All these things restrict the ability of low-income Richmond residents to access mental health services. Our

overburdened medical system could benefit from adding mental health services under the Medical Services Plan (MSP).

The RPRC recommends the provincial government:

- Add a specific number of psychologist's visits per year to the Medical Services Plan (MSP) to any person who needs this type of health care.
- Increase resources and adequate staffing for each health authority to facilitate the provision of community mental health services.

Childcare

The RPRC applauds the provincial government for establishing the \$10 a Day Childcare plan in BC. The pilot programs have proven that quality, affordable and accessible childcare is a boon for families, frees up household income for other needs, and improves our economy when women are able to confidently join the workforce. It is time to expand the program so that families in BC can enjoy the \$10 a Day Childcare program.

The RPRC recommends the provincial government:

- Expand the \$10 a Day Childcare program to all Richmond childcare providers that fit the criteria established under the ministry of Children and Family Development as per <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021CFD0059-001393>

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned at de_whalen@hotmail.com or at 604.230.3158.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Deirdre Whalen
Chair, RPRC
cc. RPRC Board of Directors