

**PRESS RELEASE**

***Irate MOMS to Premier: ‘Rethink skewed priorities, restore axed autism programs!’***

**VANCOUVER, 29 Sept. 2009:**— MOMS on the MOVE (MOMS) is deeply troubled to learn that the Province is proceeding with plans to spend \$20 million to help build a new “bricks and mortar” facility for a provincial autism centre in Vancouver, while axing local autism treatment programs across the province to cut costs. This is grossly unfair to hundreds of children across British Columbia who will be denied life-altering treatment and Premier Campbell needs to immediately rethink these skewed priorities.

The Province first confirmed the Premier’s personal commitment of \$20 million for this project a year ago. As the largest provincial network of families of children with autism and other special needs, MOMS surveyed hundreds of families, professionals and service providers about the proposal and spending priorities. All BC’s autism groups were invited to participate and share the online survey with members.

Survey responses, which we shared with government and media, reflected great urgency and an ***overwhelming*** desire to see any new spending used to expand severely-stressed services for all ages and groups vs. for a new building. Respondents also urged that government focus on more local programs (like the autism programs being axed!) vs. a “bricks & mortar” centre in Vancouver that would be inaccessible to most families, especially since most existing services are already concentrated in Greater Vancouver. These plans therefore conflict with Minister Polak’s recent commitment to focus on improving access in rural areas, where service gaps are most extreme.

In an interview with Public Eye editor Sean Holman, Minister Rich Coleman today attempted to distance this new spending from his government’s planned cuts to autism programs, arguing that capital dollars are different. Whether labeled as capital or program dollars, it’s all the same tax dollars and they all end up added to provincial debt. Just because capital spending is not reflected in the provincial deficit doesn’t make it better public policy. It appears that Premier Campbell and the BC Liberals are sacrificing the needs of children, the public interest and wise use of scarce tax dollars for nothing more than political optics.

This reflects a larger, deeply disturbing pattern in Premier Campbell’s fiscal policy. Some \$14 billion in capital “stimulus” spending is promised in the revised budget, while every election promise is broken via cuts to health, education, social supports, autism programs, community groups, even the Special Olympics – all of which directly or indirectly hurt children with special needs and their families.

If Premier Campbell can afford \$20 million for “bricks and mortar” that won’t provide a single hour of treatment to our kids, MOMS believes he can afford to save existing autism programs that deliver actual, life-changing treatment. Further, MOMS urges the Premier to immediately commit a further \$20 million to start offering equivalent services to thousands of BC children with Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, FASD, Acquired Brain Injury and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. All continue to be excluded from government-funded early intervention that could be equally effective and provide huge lifelong savings. Such a move could also pre-empt looming court challenges.

Scarce provincial dollars are far better spent serving vulnerable children than fighting desperate families in court!

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