

PRESS RELEASE:

MOMs marks Children's Day, 20th year of UN Convention, with petition urging BC Premier to honour his promises to kids

NOV. 19, 2009:—This Friday, Nov. 20th marks the 20th anniversary of the [UN Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) – a date that is also celebrated annually in Canada and elsewhere as universal Children's Day.

The MOMs provincial family support network, which has staged a series of actions in recent weeks to draw attention to BC families' concerns about new cuts and ongoing gaps in critical services for children at risk, is marking the occasion by officially launching an [online petition](#) urging BC's Premier to start living up to commitments made to BC's vulnerable children.

The UN Convention, a legally binding instrument, states that **"in all actions concerning children ...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."** Article 23 notes the obligation of signatory states to provide special supports for children with mental and physical disabilities "in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development." Article 29, which deals with the right to a free public education, re-emphasizes the right to "development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential." Elsewhere, the Convention addresses the obligation of signatory states to support parents in meeting the needs of their children where families are unable to do so themselves.

While the Convention acknowledges that state support will be shaped by available resources, nowhere does it suggest these supports should be way down on the list of national priorities, after political leaders and senior bureaucrats have enjoyed exorbitant pay and benefit increases and spent billions on hosting lavish events and costly physical infrastructure projects.

Under Great Goal #3 of his Strategic Plan for BC, Premier Campbell implicitly acknowledged these commitments when he promised to "build the best system of support in Canada" for children with special needs and those at risk. It was a truly laudable goal – but one that was never honoured and that has now been forgotten.

While BC enjoyed record budget surpluses, waitlists for crucial supports grew longer, both in and out of school. Now Children's Minister Mary Polak has cut millions, eliminating key programs for autism, FASD, infant and child development and Aboriginal children at risk. Other cuts include youth programs (mental health, addiction treatment), Special Olympics and funding for community-based children's services. Polak also cut critical monitoring and oversight roles that assure children's welfare and safety, and cut out important delivery options like direct funding. There was no risk assessment of impacts and these cuts accompany yet another major ministry re-structuring that will further strain capacity to support children at risk.

Just this week, a [leaked Ministry memo](#) revealed that the Ministry is already planning even deeper cuts targeting early intervention and community-based intervention for vulnerable children and youth in BC for 2010-11, in order to meet budget reduction targets.

Professionals, disability groups, families, community organizations, staff and ordinary citizens have pleaded with Premier Campbell, Minister Polak and their colleagues to reconsider the damage they are causing. Decades of research affirm the cost benefits of intensive early intervention and support for at-risk children – this offers real hope to struggling children and saves us all far more than it costs. For example, if families cannot cope with severely challenging children as a result of the cuts limiting access to therapy, the

Moms on the Move (MOMs) - BC families supporting people with special needs

Ministry will be forced to assume professional 24/7 care for them, at a cost of \$150,000 per child per year or more, possibly for the rest of their lives.

These cuts are not necessary – they're about priorities that dishonour both the UN Convention and the Premier's commitment under Goal #3. The revised BC budget commits \$14 billion in new capital spending. Alberta spends twice as much on autism for fewer kids – and hasn't cut this despite a far higher deficit. BC's cuts will impose far higher costs on other ministries (education, housing, justice & social services). But Polak says this is the best we can do to help BC's vulnerable children.

We disagree. These cuts are foolish, short-sighted, dishonourable and heartless. MOMs does not believe that denying supports to children in need and children at risk is consistent with the values that we hold as British Columbians. Since BC's vulnerable children can't speak up against these cuts, it is our job as parents and citizens to stand up for them. If enough British Columbians choose to speak up, government will have to respond. Remaining silent means turning our backs on each child in need.

We are therefore appealing to all British Columbians to join us by signing and circulating our petition urging Premier Campbell to honour the promises made to BC's children by acting immediately to restore, protect and strengthen vital supports for all children in need and at risk.

Details of cuts, affected programs and our ongoing campaign at MOMs: <http://MomsNetwork.ca>

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