

August 2, 2010

To: Hon. Rich Coleman,
Minister for Housing and Social Development
Victoria, BC

Dear Minister Coleman

Some months ago, you told British Columbians that budget cuts to other programs were being made in order to protect services to people with disabilities. Yet media reports recently revealed that your government has cut the budget for Community Living BC by more than \$20 million, forcing community-based agencies to close group homes for adults with developmental disabilities, with disturbing reports of residents being forcibly moved from their professionally-staffed homes to cheaper home-sharing models that may be unsafe or unsuited to their needs. These moves are being made against the wishes of residents and their families, in direct contradiction of promises made by your government.

Families also report that new applicants are being denied group home placements and forced into informal residential care models that may not be right for their needs and/or that may expose them to a high risk for potential abuse. Further disturbing reports indicate budget pressures are also eroding service quality, standards and staffing in residential care settings, jeopardising the safety and wellbeing of residents. In addition, CLBC is also promoting cluster care, despite overwhelming community opposition to cluster care as a regressive step backwards to institutionalization when this was first proposed in 2002, and subsequent assurances from your government rejecting this as part of the CLBC service delivery model.

We are deeply concerned that CLBC and you, as the Minister responsible, have failed in your duty to be honest and transparent about the changes underway, and to ensure that decisions are made with the safety and wellbeing of residents as the first priority.

It is a very grave step to force individuals with profound intellectual challenges from their homes and to forcibly relocate them to a different care model. It is highly irresponsible to take such actions without demonstrating the utmost care and transparency to assure the public that such actions are in the public interest as well as in the best interest of the individuals concerned. There is a responsibility to demonstrate persuasively that appropriate safety measures are in place to assess and address the risks involved, and that families and communities are fully engaged and respected as partners in the process.

We are deeply disturbed by the failure to live up to the above responsibilities and wish to ensure that you are aware of the concerns being voiced by a growing number of Individuals, family members and representatives, who are being excluded from decisions and/or ignored when they question the appropriateness of placement decisions that appear to ignore the best interests of these highly-vulnerable individuals.

With appropriate controls and supports, we believe that less formal residential options such as home sharing can work well for some individuals. But such arrangements are inherently less stable and are neither safe nor appropriate for all adults with developmental disabilities. International studies have demonstrated that less formal residential models like home sharing offer no savings over group homes, when the comparison involves fully accommodating the requirements of individuals with similar needs. Any savings offered by a less supportive option will entail significantly higher risks, if the resident requires high support levels to ensure safety.

CLBC has failed to demonstrate to families that appropriate oversight mechanisms are in place to monitor home sharing/ home care arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of individuals, or that residents are being offered meaningful choices and person-centred placement decisions. CLBC has also

failed to honour Minister Christensen's 2007 commitment to follow up on the first phase of the 2006 Residential Options review "to ensure that individuals in all residential services are living in their choice of residence."

We call on you to halt the current ranking and relocation program pending an independent and transparent review that includes advice from families and self-advocates on an appropriate framework to ensure that all placements are consistent with the welfare and safety of residents as the paramount consideration.

We request an urgent response from your office explaining to families how you intend to address these very serious complaints.

Sincerely

Dawn Steele & Cyndi Gerlach, MOMS on the Move

CC: Shane Simpson, Opposition Critic for MHSD and CLBC; Jane Holland, Advocate for Service Quality