

December 8, 2022

*Via Email*

Office of the Premier  
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Victoria, BC, V8W 9E1

cc: Hon. Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development  
Members of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth: Kelli Paddon,  
Mike Bernier, Susie Chant, Andrew Mercier, Karin Kirkpatrick, Fin Donnelly, Norm  
Letnick, Henry Yao, and Jennifer Rice

**Re: The Time to Transform MCFD's Culture of Risk and Surveillance is Now!**

Dear Premier Eby:

Congratulations on your new role! We look forward to working with you and your cabinet to make BC a more just and equitable place for all.

We write today to share our concerns about the system of family policing, also referred to as the child welfare/protection system in BC. We have [previously shared](#) the concerns outlined in this letter with your predecessor, Premier Horgan, and with members of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth. Minister Dean and the members of the Select Standing Committee are copied on this correspondence, as our concerns fall within the scope of their work.

We are pleased to see that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) is taking up the important and necessary work of reforming laws and policies that authorize and implement the family policing system in BC. We are also pleased to see that, with the recent introduction of Bill 38, the Province recognizes the need to align BC's laws, policies and practices with *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*, (S.C. 2019, c. 24) (federal Bill C-92). However, we stress that these are the *minimum* standards that BC must meet. We fear that without rooting out the current culture of risk and surveillance and investing in desperately needed structural supports for families, any proposed reforms will continue the legacy of tearing families apart and profoundly harming them. BC has an opportunity to show leadership in dismantling and transforming its approach to child and family health and well-being. We encourage you to approach Bill C-92 as the floor and not the ceiling of what is possible.

We call on the government to take urgent action to dismantle MCFD's framework for policing families in BC. Dismantling this framework requires that those accountable for the system work with Indigenous Nations, communities and impacted families to develop collective understandings of safety and well-being that uplift and support families in BC.

MCFD's current framework for investigation, intervention, and child removal, as well as whether and how avenues for reunification are found, causes lasting harm to families. This framework, and the culture, policies, training, and tools that guide child protection work in BC are deeply flawed and rooted in colonial, ableist, misogynistic, and classist biases. They uphold ongoing colonization in the lives of Indigenous children, youth, families, communities, and Nations.

The reliance on decontextualized checklist tools and clinical judgment is indicative of an approach to family well-being that views family struggles as individualized failings, instead of rooted in systemic failures arising from a chronic lack of housing, income and disability rates beneath the poverty line, and lack of mental health support. This racist system unjustly blames and surveils families and regards them as deficient. This is creating intergenerational cycles of intervention and intrusion in the lives of families across BC. The impact is profound on families, as Rebecca, a member of Keeping Families Together, shares, "[the] feeling of being judged and tried as guilty with no facts due to the colour of my skin, financial difficulties, location, etc."

MCFD's culture of risk and surveillance lacks accountability and transparency. Sometimes families do not even know they are being assessed. This exacerbates the already looming power disparity between MCFD and imbalance for families, and makes it difficult, if not impossible for them to challenge their assessment as 'at-risk.' Families often fear (for good reason) that they will be punished or ignored if they offer alternative understandings about their strengths and struggles. Robin, the founder of Keeping Families Together, shared the upward battle families face trying to challenge harmful narratives about their family: "[E]ven when toxicology reports showed no alcohol and drugs, I was still labeled as a drunk, still stereotyped, it's not a system of innocent till proven guilty."

We urge you to develop and affirm collective understandings of safety and well-being that uplift and support families in BC and to embed these understandings within policies, legislation, training, and tools and are made accessible to the public. This transformative and accountable work must be done with Indigenous Nations, communities and impacted families; it cannot come from rushed processes of 'consultation.' As a member of Keeping Families Together emphasized, "our children are sacred gifts from Creator and our families must be respected before any change can happen."

Small reforms are not enough. Each day spent tinkering with the system and ignoring the root cause of MCFD's culture of risk is another day where families are torn apart. We urge you to act now and act decisively. Families cannot wait any longer.

We look forward to connecting with you all on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

West Coast LEAF,  
Province-Wide

 **West Coast LEAF**

Keeping Families Together

Keeping Families Together,  
The Downtown Eastside



Parents Advocating Collectively for Kin (PACK) BC, Province-Wide



Raincity Housing, Province-Wide



BC Association of Social Workers, Province-Wide



YWCA Metro Vancouver



Sanctuary Health, Province-Wide



Pivot Legal Society,  
The Downtown Eastside



Native Women's  
Association of Canada,  
Nation-Wide



BC Complex Kids,  
Province-Wide



Single Mothers' Alliance  
of BC, Province-Wide

