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Unceded Coast Salish Homelands
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UPDATED June 2, 2021

Honourable John Horgan

Office of the Premier
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1
VIA EMAIL: Premier@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Selina Robinson

Minister of Finance
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
VIA EMAIL: FIN.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Mitzi Dean

Minister of Children and Family Development
Victoria, BC V8W 9S2
VIA EMAIL: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

BC Recovery Benefit Program

VIA EMAIL: BCRBPinfo@gov.bc.ca

RE: Denial of the BC Recovery Benefit to Kinship Caregivers

Dear Premier Horgan, Minister Robinson, and Minister Dean:

We are writing to express our urgent concern that the BC Recovery Benefit, which aims to assist families during the COVID-19 pandemic, is being denied to eligible kinship caregivers.

West Coast LEAF is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. Our mandate is to use the law to create an equal and just society for all women and people who experience gender-based discrimination. In collaboration with community, we use litigation, law reform, and public legal education to make change. Our areas of work include advocacy on the rights of parents, children, and youth and in advancing economic security.

The goal of the BC Recovery Benefit is to support families most in need of financial support during this pandemic. The estimated **more than 13,000** kinship families in BC face significant and unique financial barriers, yet it is precisely these families who are being arbitrarily denied this financial assistance. Kinship caregivers including grandparents, aunts, cousins, and other

extended family and community members are frequently the principal caregivers to children. Many kinship caregivers are grandparents living on a fixed income or in poverty who are faced with the financial burden of raising a child they did not financially plan for. Kinship care families, particularly those headed by grandparents and older single women, face significant financial hardship and higher rates of poverty. Despite their vulnerable status, kinship caregivers experience systemic barriers in attempting to access financial and other supports, including not being advised of the existence of programs by social workers, being denied access to programs and services, and facing greater hurdles in demonstrating their family status.

Kinship caregivers are critical to keeping families and communities together. In September 2019, West Coast LEAF published [Pathways in a Forest: Indigenous Guidance on Prevention-Based Child Welfare](#), a report developed collaboratively with families, Elders, and staff at the Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, and the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association. The report centers the experiences of Indigenous caregivers and families who are working against longstanding and ongoing colonial child apprehension practices in the child welfare system that break up families and communities. Critically, this report called for recognition of Indigenous paradigms on family relationships, and improved support for kinship caregivers, often grandparents or other extended family members, caring for children who would otherwise be placed in government care.

In this context, the denial of the BC Recovery Benefit to some eligible kinship caregivers is a serious concern. The BC Recovery Benefit of \$1,000 is to be made available to eligible families and single parents. The program defines a single parent as a person who is the only parent residing with a child in BC and who is the principal caregiver to at least one child.

We have learned that some single kinship caregivers have been denied the \$1,000 family benefit and only received the \$500 benefit allocated for individuals. This result is inconsistent as other kinship caregivers have received the \$1,000 family benefit. We have also learned that kinship caregivers are facing significant barriers in demonstrating their eligibility for the benefit. Kinship caregivers have reported that BC Recovery Benefit staff are not aware that a child may be in the care or custody of a person other than the child's parent pursuant to s. 54.01 and s. 54.1 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Despite providing BC Recovery Benefit staff with a court order demonstrating their custody, some kinship caregivers have nevertheless been denied the family benefit. Some kinship caregivers also report being denied the benefit because they do not receive the Canada Child Benefit although this is not a criterion for accessing this one-time provincial benefit.

The province must immediately rectify the inconsistent and unfair delivery of the benefit. With the application period for the benefit closing on June 30, 2021, urgent action must be taken to ensure that the implementation of the BC Recovery Benefit does not discriminate against kinship caregivers. We advise that the following action be taken on an urgent basis:

1. Provide training and guidance to benefit delivery staff on the existence of kinship caregiver families and their entitlement to the benefit.

2. Identify and remove the barriers that kinship caregivers are facing in demonstrating their eligibility for the benefit.
3. Take remedial action to correct applications that have been incorrectly denied ensuring that all eligible kinship caregivers receive the \$1,000 family benefit.

Kinship care families are among the most vulnerable families in our province and most of these families are headed by older, single women. These caregivers overwhelmingly lack the capacity and resources to overcome the hurdles to demonstrating their eligibility which have been reported to us and our partner organizations. We respectfully ask that you take immediate action to remedy these concerns so that kinship caregivers are not left behind as they struggle to provide care for children during the trying conditions of the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Humera Jabir (she/her)

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West Coast LEAF respectfully acknowledges that our office is on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded Coast Salish homelands including the territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlílwətaʔt/Selilwutlh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.