



Budget 2024 Consultation

Template for Public Hearing Participants

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services invites British Columbians to share their ideas and priorities for the next provincial budget. The Committee thanks all British Columbians for their continued participation in the annual budget consultation.

Should you wish to provide written information in support of your presentation, you must use this template.

Instructions:

Please provide your comments by filling out this submission form.

You may provide up to **three** recommendations (maximum 50 words each) along with your explanation for each recommendation (maximum 300 words each). Should you include more than three recommendations, additional recommendations will not be considered part of your formal submission and may only be reviewed for informational purposes.

The order of recommendations does not reflect priority.

Please ensure that your recommendations and explanations are captured within the body of the submission. Information provided through links will not be considered to form part of the submission and may only be reviewed for further interest.

If you require assistance or support to make a submission, please contact the Parliamentary Committees Office at 250-356-2933 or 1-877-428-8337 (toll-free in BC).

Please note, submissions are considered public documents and may be posted on the Committee's website and can be made available upon request to interested parties. Please do not include any personal information within the body of your submission. The Parliamentary Committees Office will remove an individual's personal contact information prior to posting or disclosing any submissions.

Additionally, the names of all individuals and organizations who provide input to the Committee are listed in the Committee's final report which is made publicly available at the conclusion of its work.

Contact Information:

First Name*:

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Submission Form

Introduction (100-word limit)

Please provide any general background information relevant to your submission (e.g. the work of your organization or relevant personal experience).

West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (WCL) is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. We 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 build transformative change in access to healthcare; access to justice; economic security; freedom from gender-based violence; justice for those who are criminalized; and family well-being.

Recommendation 1 (50-word limit)

Make a transformative investment in prevention and support services for children, youth, families, communities, and Indigenous Nations engaged in the family policing system. This investment should centre child and family well-being by addressing barriers such as poverty, scarcity of harm reduction for substance use, and inaccessibility of services (e.g., waitlists).

Recommendation 1 Explanation (300-word limit)

Use this space to provide background information relating to recommendation 1 and to explain why it should be included in the next provincial budget.

The MCFD has committed to “transformation” by emphasizing Indigenous reconciliation and early intervention, prevention, and cultural connections. However, these goals cannot be realized without significant, transformative funding to support families through accessible and safe prevention and support programs.

Funding is needed for community-based prevention programs that are localized, integrated, and wrap-around services which are best placed to understand families’ needs, mobilize resources, and develop solutions that prevent children from being placed in care. Funding must be equitable, sustainable, and cover wholistic services as identified by communities, including in-home support, pregnancy support and baby welcoming programs, transition support, programming for families after children have been removed or upon being returned home, supports for parents whose children are in care, immediate in-home support to prevent removal, cultural programming, and safe supports for substance use and mental health (see West Coast LEAF’s report: “Pathways in a Forest: Indigenous Guidance on Prevention-Based Child Welfare”).

Funding must be directed to Indigenous Nations and communities to ensure that they have the resources to support families in accordance with their own traditions and practices, respecting the self-determination of Indigenous Nations and communities.

In 2023, MCFD postponed implementation of its Prevention and Family Support Service Framework in its 2022 service plan. Failing to urgently act on and invest in prevention is a false economy when the economic and social costs associated with child apprehension, including incarceration and impacts on education, substance use, health and wellness are considered. We recommend BC demonstrate an investment in prevention by prioritizing an increase to MCFD's "Family Support" budget line.

Recommendation 2 (50-word limit)

Dedicate new funding for legal aid retainers for financially eligible persons seeking assistance with obtaining spousal support. There is currently no funding available for legal aid services for spousal support which undermines access to legally protected financial entitlements post-separation and worsens increasingly feminized poverty as well as child poverty.

Recommendation 2 Explanation (300-word limit)

Use this space to provide background information relating to recommendation 2 and to explain why it should be included in the next provincial budget.

Over a decade ago, legal aid services were gutted, and today, family law legal aid remains severely underfunded. The lack of access to legal aid directly contributes to increasingly worse feminized poverty by depleting critical resources post-separation, leading to greater indebtedness for legal costs and a lack of access to spousal and child support secured through the courts.

While increased funding is needed for family law legal aid overall, providing new legal aid funding for spousal support applications for financially eligible persons is one critical part of a larger reinvestment in legal aid in BC. Spousal support is an important legally protected financial entitlement that addresses the poorer financial position of a spouse post-separation due to sacrificing income for caregiving responsibilities among other reasons, and to help a spouse in financial need after the breakdown of a partnership. In 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that there was “no doubt that divorce and its economic effects are playing a role in the feminization of poverty in Canada.” The impact of a lack of access to the courts to secure spousal support has worsened in recent years as costs of living and housing have skyrocketed.

Despite the laws protecting the right to spousal support, BC does not offer legal aid services for spousal support applications and is lagging behind other jurisdictions. Most provinces and territories offer complete or limited coverage of spousal support legal aid services.

Investing in access to legal aid services for spousal support matters is a funding priority that would make a tangible difference in the lives of single parent families. Access to spousal support also mitigates many downstream costs of poverty by supporting families as they work towards self-sufficiency and economic stability in the aftermath of separation.

Recommendation 3 (50-word limit)

Increase funding for the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) at BC Housing to \$20 million to expand the program to all eligible transitional housing programs across the province. This funding would directly assist survivors of family violence by preventing homelessness and increasing long-term safety when fleeing violence.

Recommendation 3 Explanation (300-word limit)

Use this space to provide background information relating to recommendation 3 and to explain why it should be included in the next provincial budget.

The leading cause of homelessness among women and people who are marginalized because of their gender is violence. A lack of access to safe, appropriate, and affordable housing is a primary barrier to escaping gender-based violence and abuse, as well as one of the commonly reported reasons women and people who are marginalized because of their gender return to violent homes. BC's lack of affordable housing also means that survivors stay longer in second stage transition housing, further reducing available spaces in this already under-resourced sector. BC's investment in transition and second-stage housing and long-term housing affordability supports for survivors has fallen far behind the need in this period of escalated family violence.

While funding is needed to support immediate housing needs for survivors fleeing violence, investments are also needed to support survivors moving to more secure, long-term housing. The BCSTH states that in BC, after women leave a transition house only 4% move to affordable housing, 21% find housing mostly beyond their means and 75% remain temporarily sheltered or return to their abusive partner. Only 5-10% of women experiencing violence access rental supplements in BC. Despite the dire need for housing supports, no new homeless prevention programs have been added to the BC Housing budget since the HPP program started in 2014.

As recommended by the BCSTH, funding to the HPP program should be increased from \$4 million to \$20 million to ensure the program meets the scale of the need and is more widely available. The HPP program provides flexible homelessness prevention grants to survivors and funds the support services of an outreach worker. The HPP program has been a successful, critical resource for survivors of violence seeking secure, market rental housing. HPP workers also support recipients in finding employment and developing strategies to maintain safe, affordable housing.

We require your acknowledgement that you have read our [privacy policy](#) (required in order to formally receive your submission).

I have read and agreed to the Privacy Policy of the Parliamentary Committees Office.

We also seek your permission to post your submission on the Committee's website following the release of the Budget 2024 Consultation Report. Please note that we only post submissions on the website where consent has been received; however, any submission may be provided to interested parties upon request as submissions are considered public documents.

I consent to having my submission posted on the Legislative Assembly website.

Upon completion, please save this document with your last name and first name or organization name (if applicable), and email to financecommittee@leg.bc.ca.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services' Budget 2024 Consultation.

To learn more about the consultation and the work of the Committee, visit the [Committee's website](#).