

October 26th, 2022

Office of the Premier
PO BOX 9041
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC, V8W 9E1

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

Dear Premier Horgan and Members of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth,

We write to you today to seek urgent action to dismantle the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) framework for policing families in British Columbia. We call on you to take up transformative and accountable work with Indigenous Nations 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 wellbeing 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, "even 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."

While we are pleased to see that MCFD is taking up work to reform and transform their approach, we fear that without rooting out the current culture of risk and surveillance and

investing in desperately needed structural supports for families, any proposed changes will continue the legacy of tearing families apart and profoundly harming them.

We urge you to develop collective and affirm understandings of safety and well-being that uplift and support families in BC and 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 Nation and impacted families and 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."

These small reforms are not enough. Every 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.

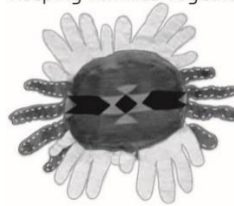
Sincerely,

West Coast LEAF,
Province-Wide



Keeping Families
Together, The
Downtown Eastside

Keeping Families Together



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



Raincity Housing,
Province-Wide



BC Association of Social
Workers, Province-Wide



YWCA Metro Vancouver

