

Human rights denied: Single mothers on social assistance in British Columbia ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

- Report in pdf ^[2]

- Press release in pdf ^[3]

Executive summary:

In the last four years the Government of British Columbia has introduced a package of legislative and regulatory changes that disproportionately harms single mothers on social assistance and their children. These changes, especially when combined with cuts and changes to child care, employment standards and access to post-secondary education, deepen the disadvantage of single mothers—one of the most vulnerable groups in our province.

This Government of British Columbia's social assistance policies for single mothers are a cruel failure. The social assistance regime purports to provide for the basic needs for food, shelter and clothing of the poorest single mothers and their children, but it does not.

The regime and related child care, employment standards and post-secondary education policies also purport to help women to become economically self-sufficient, but, perversely, they have had the effect of creating more barriers to employment for poor women with dependent children.

Social assistance rules and policy treat single mother families in often confusing and contradictory ways. This is because the regime is based on stereotypes and myths about single mothers, including the myth that single mother's poverty is the result of bad personal choices. Single mothers' poverty is caused by a combination of social and economic factors, including the undervaluing of child-raising work, the lower value attached to women's paid work, lack of adequate child care, and the conflict between parent and worker responsibilities. It is too simple and inaccurate to blame single mothers for their own poverty.

It is not inevitable that single mothers and their children will be denied access to economic and social well-being. It can be different. Other countries, like Sweden for example, through income transfer programmes to families with children and facilitated access to high quality child care, have ten-fold lower poverty rates among single-parent families than Canada.

The current government has not only failed to respond to the needs of single mother-led families on social assistance - already in the 1990s living well below the poverty line - but the government has, through calculated and purposeful legislative change, orchestrated the aggravation and worsening of the economic and social inequality of these single mothers and their children.

The Government's actions are not merely bad policy; they are illegal. They discriminate against single mothers and are contrary to the rights to equality guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights of Freedoms, the BC Human Rights Code, and international human rights treaties.

Human Rights Denied calls upon the Government to take immediate steps to stop ignoring the human rights of single mothers and to remedy this wrong.

Region: Canada ^[4]

British Columbia ^[5]

Tags: funding ^[6]

gender ^[7]

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