



March 2, 2021

Honourable Mitzi Dean
Minister of Children and Family Development
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Minister Dean:

I am writing concerning B.C.'s autism funding provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development to help pay for eligible services or supports that promote skill development for children living with autism.

In a recent report entitled "Left Out: Children and youth with special needs in the pandemic," the Representative for Children and Youth highlighted the additional challenges families of children with special needs have faced during the pandemic. The report pointed out the government's lack of clear communication with families, the inability to approve funding promptly, and the increased burden on these families as they lost respite support and other vital services.

Indeed, this past year has been particularly difficult for families with children with autism. In particular, allowable expenses for the autism funding are strictly limited. As a result of COVID-19 restrictions and concerns about young people with special needs being immunocompromised, many therapeutic activities, camps, life and social skills programs were not available during this time. This resulted in additional expenses incurred by families which were ineligible for funding.

Many families lost work opportunities and income because they needed to be with their children 24/7. It is not uncommon for families with children with autism to live in poverty. These families are marginalized, not only by the lack of funding for intervention and therapies but because they have less access to appropriate childcare, as well as decreased employment opportunities.

Often, as these children lapse in their continued development, their families struggle to undo the damages caused by the regression. Therapies and required programs have been pushed forward to subsequent years where these young people will be left to compensate for the present loss of services.



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On behalf of these families, I would ask that, at minimum, unspent allowances under their autism funding be carried forward into the next contract year.

Clawing back these allowances — in addition to the \$200 per month cut last September — is causing additional hardship for families who have already felt the pain of this pandemic more than many others.

Regards,

Karin Kirkpatrick
MLA, West Vancouver-Capilano
Official Opposition Critic for Children, Family Development & Childcare

cc: Shirley Bond, Leader of the Official Opposition, MLA, Prince George-Valemount