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May 23, 2014

Premier Christy Clark  
West Annex  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC  
V8V 1X4  
Via email: [premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Premier Clark,

**Re: Bill M212: *The Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act***

We write to add our support to Bill M212: *The Poverty Reduction and Economic Inclusion Act*, proposed in the BC Legislature on May 6, 2014. As an organization committed to advancing the equality rights of women and girls in BC, we know that poverty is a gendered issue, and one that requires immediate action. As the province with the highest rate of poverty for the past 13 years, and one of only two provinces without a poverty reduction plan, it is time for BC to take concrete action to address poverty and its disproportionate impact on women and their children in this province.

Under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, to which Canada is party, states have an obligation to take reasonable steps, to the maximum of their available resources, towards ensuring the rights of everyone to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions (Article 11). States Parties to the *Covenant* also undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of these rights (Article 3). Moreover, government has an obligation under section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to guarantee the rights to life, liberty and security of the person to the people of Canada, and to ensure equal treatment under section 15. In our submission, BC's lack of a poverty reduction plan contributes to ongoing violations of these constitutional and international human rights.

Poverty in BC is very much an issue of women's equality. In 2008, the United Nations Committee which monitors states' compliance with the UN *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), another international human rights treaty to which Canada is party, expressed concern at the cuts to social assistance schemes in BC, and the resulting negative impact on the rights of vulnerable groups of women including single mothers, Indigenous women, African-Canadian women, immigrant and migrant women, elderly women and disabled women, who may rely on social assistance for an adequate standard of living. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has also expressed concern about women's poverty in BC, noting that inadequate social

assistance presents an additional obstacle for women fleeing abusive relationships. In West Coast LEAF's annual CEDAW Report Card, in which we assess the BC government's compliance with its international human rights obligations under CEDAW, the Province has never scored higher than a "D" grade in the Social Assistance and Poverty category.

The poverty rate for children living with lone-parent mothers jumped from 16.4% to 24.6% in 2011 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), representing 27,000 children. The median market income for female-led lone-parent families also fell dramatically, from \$32,000 to \$21,500 per year. BC women's earnings lag behind the national average; in 2010, women in BC made \$2,700/year less than the average for women throughout Canada. In addition, the rate of growth in wages for women in BC from 2002-10 was 0.49% each year, compared to 1.4% for all Canadian women. Moreover, women in BC make on average only 65% of what men in BC do (and 76% when only full-time, full-year work is considered). This level of poverty and inequality is unacceptable in a province as wealthy as British Columbia. It also belies the government's claims that "growing the economy" and encouraging people to work is the solution to poverty. Gendered wage gaps, workplace discrimination, and women's disproportionate responsibility for childcare and the impact of this on their ability to work in stable full-time jobs, all contribute to women's poverty and economic inequality. The solutions will require much more than a laissez-faire approach to BC's economic and social policy.

Bill M212 proposes the development of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy within one year, and would legislate specific targets and timelines to reduce the breadth and depth of poverty in BC. It also includes extensive community consultation, including with those living in poverty, and outlines how government should be held accountable for progress. It commits to embed targets in legislation, to appoint a lead Minister, to have a cabinet committee to oversee the strategy co-chaired by the Premier, to have an outside advisory committee to hold the government to account, and to annual reporting to monitor progress.

These are essential steps that government must take in order to meet its international and constitutional obligations to address poverty and economic inequality and its disproportionate impact on women. We call on you to show leadership on this issue and take immediate action to pass Bill M212.

Yours truly,



Laura Track  
Legal Director

Cc: Hon. Don McRae, Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation  
Hon. Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development  
John Horgan, MLA, Leader of the Opposition  
Michelle Mungall, MLA for Nelson-Creston  
BC Poverty Reduction Coalition