



West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund

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April 27, 2020

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
Minister of National Revenue
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

VIA EMAIL: Diane.Lebouthillier@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Lebouthillier,

Re: COVID-19 Economic Response Plan - Canada Child Benefit eligibility for kinship caregivers

We are writing to ask you to extend the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) increase, introduced as part of the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, to kinship caregivers.¹

West Coast LEAF is a BC-based legal advocacy organization. Our mandate is to 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 make change. In particular, we aim to transform society by achieving access to healthcare; access to justice, economic security, freedom from gender-based violence, justice for those who are criminalized and the right to parent.

In September 2019, West Coast LEAF published *Pathways in a Forest: Indigenous guidance on prevention-based child welfare*, a report developed collaboratively with families, Elders, and staff at the Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, and the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association. *Pathways* centres the voices of caregivers and families who shared their stories and perspectives on the ongoing impact of the child welfare system.

The report sets out a number of urgent recommendations to address the systemic harm of the child welfare system by working with Indigenous communities to keep families together. This includes improved support for kinship caregivers, often grandparents or other extended family members, caring for children who otherwise would be in government care.

On March 18, 2020 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the federal government would temporarily increase the CCB by \$300 per child as part of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. The increase in support is intended to account for the difficulties associated with school closures and additional child-care responsibilities. West Coast LEAF welcomes the federal government's efforts to support families during this challenging time.

¹ Letter drafted by Amelia Roth, Articling Student, West Coast LEAF.



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While the one-time increase to the CCB will help many families, unfortunately, kinship caregivers and the children in their care will not receive this support because kinship caregivers do not currently receive the CCB. Under the *Children's Special Allowance Act*, any federal benefits these families may be eligible for are transferred directly to the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) yet MCFD has not indicated it will increase financial support to \$300 per child. It is worth noting that, because these families are ineligible for the CCB, they are also ineligible for the Child Disability Benefit and many are also ineligible for Registered Education Savings Plans.

The aim of the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan is to support families most in need of financial support during this pandemic. The estimated 1,400 kinship families in BC face significant and unique financial barriers, yet, it is precisely these families who are arbitrarily excluded from accessing these necessary financial supports. Many kinship caregivers are grandparents living on a fixed income or in poverty and faced with the financial burden of raising a child they did not financially plan for. Further, many children living away from their family may be coping with trauma and require additional and unique supports which result in significant costs left unmet by the current income supports available to kinship caregivers.

We know that children are significantly better off with extended family than in government care and kinship caregivers are doing the difficult work of supporting children from staying out of care and within their families and communities. Accordingly, we join Parent Support Services Society of BC and other partner organizations in calling on provincial and federal governments to find a solution whereby these families can receive the support they need. As families struggle to provide and care for children during the trying conditions of a global pandemic, we must ensure that kinship caregivers are not left behind and receive the support they need.

We respectfully ask you to ensure that the CCB increase is extended to the many kinship caregivers caring for children across Canada.

Sincerely,

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cc: The Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children & Family Development