



Ref: 189605

MAY 16 2016

Her Worship Mayor Lisa Helps  
and Councillors  
City of Victoria  
1 Centennial Square  
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Dear Mayor Helps and Council:

Thank you for your letter of April 6, 2016, regarding income assistance rates in British Columbia. I appreciate receiving your comments and commend you for your advocacy on behalf of vulnerable citizens in British Columbia. As Minister, I am pleased to respond.

I appreciate receiving your comments and commend you for your advocacy on behalf of vulnerable citizens in British Columbia.

As you are aware, the BC Employment and Assistance (or Income Assistance) program is an income- and asset-tested program of last resort, intended to help eligible British Columbians temporarily while they look for work, and those who are not able to work due to a disability.

It is important to note, however, that our government carefully considers the services delivered under the BCEA program every year along with the competing demands on the budget. The rate structure takes into account all provincial and federal tax credits, child benefits, and other available programs and supports for low-income families and families on income and disability assistance.

.../2

Our government's goal is also for individuals to have the supports they need to assist them in becoming more independent. Over the last few years, the Province has made a number of significant changes to the BCEA programs to provide supports that are helping people improve their financial picture get them back into the workforce and improve outcomes, including:

- Increasing the earnings exemption for families from \$200 to \$400 and to \$500 for families with a child with a severe disability.
- Implementing the Single Parent Employment Initiative which helps eligible single parents receiving income and disability assistance to secure employment.
- Fully exempting child support payments.
- Implementing Transitional Health Services, which provides continued access to certain health supplements for up to one year to families with children who leave income or disability assistance for employment.

While our government monitors the costs of rental housing in British Columbia when setting income assistance rates, I recognize that in many areas of the province, shelter costs can be high. We continue to explore new ways to collaborate with community agencies, cities and developers to promote safe and affordable housing.

Thank you again for writing and for your continued dedication and advocacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Stilwell".

Michelle Stilwell  
Minister