

IF YOUR MLA IS GREEN

This fact sheet is designed to assist you when you contact your local Green Party MLA.

Meeting Goals:

- to start/build a relationship with your local MLA
- to present yourself as an accessible and knowledgeable resource
- to let them know that their constituents are expecting an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan and want the government to work together on this

Start by thanking your MLA for their long-time commitment to a poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines, and for bringing questions about welfare and disability rates and the cost of poverty to the legislature floor. Encourage them to read the *What We Heard About Poverty in BC* reports¹ and to recognize the need to address the issues raised in them.

Facts are great but connecting on a personal level is even better so try:

- **Telling a personal story of how poverty impacts you**, your family, your community or the people you work with – highlight the root causes of the issues: low income, lack of affordable housing and childcare, etc. *If you work with people in poverty, provide practical and other supports to have them come to the meeting and share what they want to see in a poverty reduction plan.*
- **Sharing what you value most about your community and your concerns**, and ask them to do the same: connect the need for a poverty reduction plan to their concerns.

Ask them to push for an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan for BC.

Talk through the policy brief with them and leave a few copies: “An Effective Poverty Reduction Plan: It’s as simple as ABC” at <http://www.abcplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Policy-Brief.pdf>

Here are some things your MLA might say and ways you can respond:

Your MLA might say, “We are excited that thanks to the Green Party’s advocacy, the government is convening a Basic Income Expert Panel”

- **A basic income could only be successfully implemented if it is complemented by strong universal basic services in an accountable, bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan.** While basic income has the advantage of reducing the stigma and bureaucracy of accessing welfare and disability assistance, it must at least meet the Market Basket Measure (approx. \$1700/month), and ensure that nobody is worse off due to receiving basic income payments. It

¹ Province of British Columbia <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/bcpovertyreduction/read-public-and-stakeholder-input/>

also must be complemented by a strong minimum wage (so that it doesn't subsidize low-wage employers) and substantial public investments in housing, healthcare, childcare and education.

Your MLA might say "We are working with Minister Simpson on the forthcoming poverty reduction plan"

- **Poverty is a complex problem that requires all Ministries to work together.** The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction cannot implement an effective poverty reduction plan alone. On page 40 of the What We Heard Report, participants "called for action to break down silos and for greater transparency across government." The over-arching vision and first steps for this poverty reduction plan matter, and we need your help to make sure that the whole government is working together on implementing a truly effective cross-ministry plan.

Your MLA might say "the B.C. Greens committed to transitioning people to livable incomes, starting with an increase in social assistance rates by 50 percent above 2017 levels by 2020 and we are pushing the government to do so."

- Thank you for your commitment to a more substantial long-term increase to welfare and disability rates than any other party. **However, we can do better.** \$915/month for a single "employable" person by 2020 would not cover basic needs. In 2017, the average rent of a room in a boarding house in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside was \$687 and healthy diet costs are, on average, \$225/month. To raise income and disability assistance rates to the poverty line (approx. \$1,700/month), it would cost \$1.16 billion, only 2% of the provincial budget.
- According to Carnegie Community Action Project's 2017 *Hotel Survey and Housing Report*, the increase in average rents in a boarding house in the Downtown Eastside was \$139 over last year's rate—wiping out the \$100 increase in welfare rates. **Without rent control tied to the unit, many of the government's policy changes will not have the beneficial impact expected or hoped for.**

Your MLA might say "if we implement rent control to the unit, it will discourage developers from building and/or maintaining rental housing."

- **This form of rent control is not new to BC.** Part of the 1974 *Landlord and Tenant Act* limited rent increases to once every twelve months, regardless of whether a change in tenant or landlord had occurred. In place from 1974 to 1984, with cross-party political support in response to a 0.5% vacancy rate, there was no discernible impact on new rental housing or increased neglect of buildings. Rent control has the potential to maintain the diversity of our neighbourhoods rather than making a growing number only available to those that can afford them, displacing everyone else and leaving our communities lacking. Page 21 of the *What We Heard* report highlights that "There was widespread support from participants for rent control linked to units, so landlords cannot dramatically increase rent when tenants change, or when income and disability assistance rates increase."

End with a concrete action: invite them to an event or request a follow-up meeting.

Before you go, please let us know when you have a meeting scheduled with your MLA and, afterwards, let us know how it went. Email us at info@bcpovertyreduction.ca – thank you!

More information at bcpovertyreduction.ca