

May 5, 2022



The Honourable Mitzi Dean  
Minister of Children and Family Development  
PO Box 9057 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Dean,

**Re: Foster Caregiver Maintenance and Service Payment Rates**

In 2019, MCFD's Strategic Priorities team confirmed that they were engaging in the process of reviewing and redesigning the foster caregiver rates across the province. We were informed last year that the priority had shifted to establishing an additional level for caregivers who are caring for children with more complex support needs, and to provide better compensation for out-of-care families. While these are very worthwhile and necessary projects, we understand that this work is not very far along. We had delayed writing this letter previously in good faith that a focused effort was underway to resolve the inadequate maintenance and service payments for foster caregivers – but our community is unable to wait any longer.

As the legal guardian, it is the Province's responsibility to ensure that the children and youth in their care are adequately supported in their placements. BC's foster caregivers are struggling to afford healthy food, to provide extracurricular activities and of course, to afford to transport children to and from school and regular visits with family members who often reside in distant communities. Many of the steps other families take to drastically reduce expenses are unavailable to foster families. Foster caregivers cannot be expected to use their savings or seek employment to supplement the expense of raising children who are not their legal responsibility. According to our recent cost-of-living survey, 61% of foster caregivers who participated in the survey foster full time with no other source of income.

Foster caregivers have not received an increase to service payments since 2009. These were small increases over a three-year period. The cost of living has increased almost 30% since 2009. As the economic crisis worsens, all core costs of raising a family continue to increase – housing, food, utilities, technology, and transportation. Foster caregivers are now screaming for increases to both maintenance rates and service payments as they contemplate finding full time work to afford their current homes and support their families. To accommodate the children and youth in their care, many foster families live in housing that is larger and more expensive than they would otherwise need. Our cost-of-living survey indicates that the maintenance rate does not adequately provide for nutritional needs or payment of the child/youth's portion of expenses in 73% of foster homes. A full 75% of foster caregivers state that financial support impacts their decision to continue fostering.

**BC Foster Parents Association**

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All foster caregivers are feeling the weight of economic stress. This added to two years of pandemic restrictions, no financial assistance or accessible relief, inadequate communication and partnership from care team members and the requirement to risk their health and that of their family's for in-person visits during mandated isolation, has resulted in a movement toward self-preservation. Foster caregivers are exhausted and demoralized. This is the impact of too little support for too long.

Satisfied caregivers are our best recruiters of new foster caregivers. The lack of adequate support has proven to make the recruitment and retention of skilled foster caregivers an uphill task. Foster caregiver attrition is now an issue across the province.

Foster caregivers have no authority, yet they carry a great deal of responsibility for the wellbeing of children and youth, providing safe housing and healthful lifestyles. Without supportive care team members and timely financial intervention, we are asking too much. They are opting to leave their dreams of raising foster children behind. The province is already experiencing a shortage of skilled caregivers to do the difficult and valuable work of raising children and youth with unique support needs.

Additional statistics from our cost-of-living survey with 485 respondents:

- 53% of foster caregivers are inadequately supported to cover the expenses of children and youth placed in their homes
- 80% of foster caregivers state that they do not receive any additional supplemental or exceptional payments from MCFD
- 35% of foster caregivers state that they may have no option but to stop fostering in order to support themselves and their families
- 85% of foster caregivers are extremely or moderately concerned about their housing situation
- 90% of foster caregivers state that the current higher prices are impacting their ability to meet their financial obligations
- 96% of foster caregivers admit that higher prices are impacting their mental health in either major, moderate or minor ways
- 20% of foster caregivers state that their financial position is very or extremely unstable
- Foster caregivers have recently cut back on expenses in the following areas:
  - 77% in food choices
  - 74% in household maintenance
  - 87% in entertainment, sport events, hobbies, children's activities
  - 72% in financial contributions (savings and investments)
  - 50% in technology
  - 61% in clothing
  - 87% in travel and recreation
  - 51% in transportation
  - 27% in healthcare related costs

- 26% in utilities
- 16% in personal care and hygiene products
- 9% in housing related expense
- Foster caregivers specifically state the following supports are needed:
  - 64% the cost of travel/transportation
  - 47% the cost of health and dental benefits
  - 46% the cost of technology
  - 45% the cost of respite care
  - 34% the cost of counselling for children and youth in their care
  - 33% the cost of connecting children and youth to their culture
  - 26% the cost of counselling for the foster caregiver
  - 19% the cost of counselling for family members

Foster caregivers are supporting our most vulnerable citizens and have now become vulnerable themselves. Like the children and youth placed in their care, they deserve more than just their survival needs to be met. Foster caregivers must be able to afford to meet their own and their family's needs, which, due to the nature of the work, are different than non-fostering families. Foster caregivers must be supported emotionally and financially so that they can provide care to a level that supports children to flourish. We have walked with foster families through their journey for 55 years and we know that the most successful foster caregivers are well-supported. In the words of one foster caregiver who participated in the survey: *"We need MCFD to understand that asking for support does not reflect our ability to care for children and youth with complex needs. Adequate supports are necessary to ensure the health and wellbeing of the children and youth entrusted to our care, our families and as caregivers."* Caregivers who are stressed daily, who struggle to support their families and pay out of pocket for additional expenses, are unable to focus exclusively on ensuring the best care for the children and youth in their homes.

For the past two years, the global public discourse has been increasingly focused on equity and justice for all, which includes providing a living wage so that no one who works for a living is living in poverty. The Province has committed to providing the highest minimum wage of any province at \$15.65. The increase is the first to be tied to BC's annual inflation rate. Of course, foster caregivers are not paid a wage and have a contractual relationship with our provincial government. However, foster caregivers are caring for BC's most vulnerable children, youth and families – a 24/7 job without stability or benefits. Foster caregiver rates have been consistently overlooked throughout the past two decades. In that same time, expectations of foster caregivers have increased immeasurably! It is our fervent hope that BC's many dedicated foster families do not fall further behind.

BC Foster Parents Association has been working in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Family Development since 1967. We bring emerging and critical foster sector issues to the Ministry's attention long before a crisis point is reached. We are asking that the Ministry please, for the preservation of our

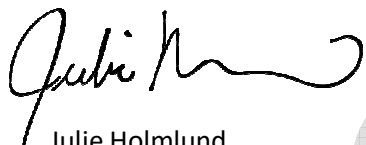
valuable and necessary foster resources for children and youth in our province, increase foster caregiver maintenance and service payments to a reasonable and sustainable level including annual cost-of-living increases.

In the past, BCFPA and foster caregivers were included in the work to design the maintenance and service payment structure. When this work begins again, a collaborative and inclusive process will ensure that the structure meets foster caregiver needs. It is essential to engage in consultation with those whose lives are substantially impacted by long term program design and decisions.

We look forward to working together with the Ministry of Children and Family Development to ensure that we are able to retain and recruit valuable foster caregivers who open their hearts and homes to vulnerable children and youth.

Please contact our Executive Director, Jayne Wilson, at 604-544-1116 or [jayne@bcfosterparents.ca](mailto:jayne@bcfosterparents.ca) should you desire to schedule a discussion.

Sincerely,



Julie Holmlund  
President



Jayne Wilson  
Executive Director