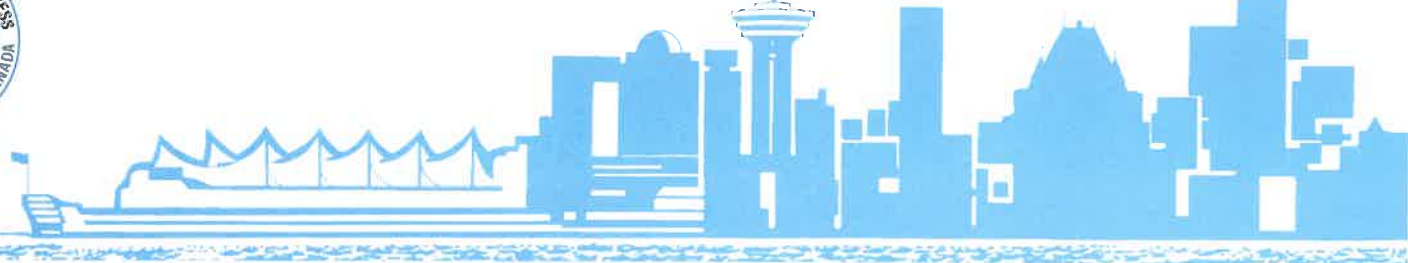




VANCOUVER and DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL



January 28, 2021

VIA Email: The Honourable John Horgan, M.L.A., Premier of the Province of British Columbia – premier@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable Nicholas Simons, M.L.A., Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction – sdpr.minister@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable Selina Robinson, M.L.A., Minister of Finance – fin.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier and Ministers,

RE: Disability Assistance Rates

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of working people and our communities during these early days of your new majority government, and under the difficult circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am writing today on behalf of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, representing approximately 60,000 unionized workers in Vancouver and surrounding municipalities. I write with regards to concerns raised by delegates to our council, and subsequently discussed at our recent monthly meeting, related to changes to disability assistance rates.

As you are of course aware, in April 2020, the Government of British Columbia introduced a \$300 supplement to disability assistance rates in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was broadly welcomed by advocates.

This increase raised the base amount of disability assistance to \$1,483.42 a month, or \$17,801.04 annually, and the base amount of income assistance to \$1,060.00 a month, or \$12,720 annually. Unfortunately, this improvement still fell below the poverty line, as defined by the Government of British Columbia, of \$20,000 per year for individuals.

On December 8, 2020, Minister of Finance Selina Robinson announced that starting on December 18 families and individuals could apply for the BC COVID Recovery Benefit, a one-time payment of up to \$1,000 per family or \$500 per individual based on income.

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The government further announced that it would not claw back the BC Recovery Benefit from people receiving income or disability assistance, but they would reduce the \$300 monthly supplement to \$150 and discontinue it in March of 2021.

It is there that the concerns arise. While this decision will increase income to some recipients by \$50 by the end of March, some recipients will not qualify and will immediately lose \$150 a month in income, and all recipients will experience a sharp reduction in income in April 2021. This change removes a crucial lifeline that people relied on during the ongoing pandemic, causes significant additional uncertainty and fear, and ultimately leaves them below the poverty line. We are also concerned that pandemic-related increased expenses can disproportionately affect people living with disabilities.

We are therefore asking the Government of British Columbia to maintain the \$300/month increase to income and disability assistance rates, and permanently raise income assistance rates to at least the poverty line, indexed to inflation. We would also submit that increases to income assistance and disability assistance include a clear, earmarked increase to the shelter portion. We are also supportive of the previously announced policy that there would be no claw backs in relation to the BC COVID Recovery Benefit.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this matter. All the best to you in 2021.

Yours Truly,



Stephen von Sychowski
President, VDLC

cc: VDLC Executive Board

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