

## Press Release

### **Over 50 small business owners, non-profit leaders and advocates demand the government change the rules preventing disabled workers from earning a living wage**

For immediate release

June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Vancouver, unceded X<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) homelands – A group of more than XX small business owners, non profit-leaders and advocates are calling on the BC government to urgently remove the earnings limits for people receiving disability assistance so that they can earn a Living Wage.

In an open letter addressed to the Minister for Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the group ask the government to use the 2024 update to the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy to remove the earnings exemption and help disabled workers to earn a living wage.

In their letter, they state that workers who receive disability assistance can only earn \$16,200 a year before their disability benefits are clawed back. According to the group, once they reach this threshold, these workers face a punitive response from the ministry and might lose access to other entitlements, such as access to housing.

Anastasia French, provincial manager for Living Wage for Families BC explains that the Earnings Limit puts employers in a difficult position; *“Living Wage Employers who want to do the right thing face a difficult dilemma - do they pay their disabled staff less by offering them fewer hours than their non-disabled peers or do they let their staff lose access to the support they’re entitled to?”*

In January, the government increased the earnings exemption threshold from \$15,000 a year to \$16,200. However, French explained that this does not match the amount that the Living Wage has increased in recent years. *“In 2021, if an employer wanted to pay their staff a living wage, then their staff in receipt of Disability Assistance would be able to work 730 hours a year at the living wage without losing their payments, now it is 630 hours a year. We believe that a person with a disability should be able to work as much as they would like to without having their disability benefits clawed back.”*

Chantelle Spicer, campaign manager for the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition explains that this limit keeps people with disabilities trapped in a cycle of poverty: *“A single person on disability assistance receives \$1,483.50 in PWD income per month. If this person can also work up to the maximum earnings limit without exceeding it, then their total monthly net income would be, on average, \$2,833.50. This is far below the amount*

*needed to pay for rent, food and other essentials in a province as expensive as BC. In addition, people with disabilities have additional costs including medication, caregivers and mobility aids. These limits leave disabled workers trapped in poverty rather than providing a route out of poverty.”*

Helaine Boyd, executive director of Disability Alliance BC outlines the challenges that she as an employer face with these restrictions; *“As employers who want to ensure we do not negatively impact our staff’s access to Disability Assistance, we often work with the employee to determine how much they can feasibly work or if they can come off Disability Assistance and maybe lose access to their housing and other supports. It is sickening that I need to have these conversations with staff regarding how many hours they can work, solely because of restrictions put in place by the Ministry, and not a discussion on how many hours they can work based on their own understanding of their capacity. These rules make a mockery of employers like us and other living wage employers or organizations that work to uphold the dignity and self-determination of people with disabilities.”*

The following individuals have co-signed the open letter:

Tuesday Andrich, Scott DeLong, Stacy Ashton, & Daniel Harper, Co-chairs, BC Health Coalition

Amanda Arkesteyn, Director- HR & Safety, ACYAS

David Balfour, Director, Clayton Heights Sports and Therapy

Toby Barazzuol, President, Eclipse Awards

Christopher Bate, Executive Director, Comox Valley Senior Support

Montana Burgess, Executive Director, Neighbours United

Andrea Burton , CEO, Physiotherapy Association of BC

Pamela Charron, Executive Director, Worker Solidarity Network

Angela Clancy, Executive Director, Family Support Institute of BC

Wendy Cox, Executive Director, Victoria Disability Resource Centre

Lisa Curry, Executive Director, Megaphone

Alison Dantes, CEO, Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver

Arman Hans, People and Culture Advisor, DiverseCITY Community Resources Society

Dan Huang-Taylor, Executive Director, Food Banks BC

Liza Hughes, Executive Director, BC Civil Liberties Association

Michael Duhaime, Parent of a person with a disability

Doramy Ehling, CEO, Rick Hansen Foundation

Christopher Girodat, Executive Director, Capilano Students' Union

Franceska Grantzidis, Interim Executive Director, Plan Institute

Genesa Greening, Chief Executive Officer, Vancity Community Foundation

Terri Hopkinson, Communications Coordinator, AutismBC

Hajira Hussain, Executive Director, Richmond Food Bank Society

Andrew Igel, Owner, Igel Architecture

Sharnelle Jenkins-Thompson, Manager of Community Outreach, West Coast LEAF

Kurt Johnston, CEO, CleanStart Property Services CCC

Bill Kilgannon, Director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - BC Office  
Douglas C. King, Executive Director, Together Against Poverty Society  
Astrid Koenig, Director, Building Bridges Community Support  
Megan Kriger, Director, Lookout Housing and Health Society  
Mimoza, person with a disability  
Michelle Lackie, Executive Director, Exchange Inner City  
Aly Laube, Marketing & Outreach Coordinator, AutismBC  
Amanda Lockitch, BC Community Organizer, Disability Without Poverty BC  
Sarah Marsden, Director, Systems Change and Legal, First United  
Patricia Massy, Owner, Founder and Director, Massy Books and Massy Arts Society  
Sean Miles, Director, Makeway Charitable Society - Binnars' Project  
Megan Milton, Project Organizer, B.C. Health Coalition  
Stephanie McGowan, Executive Director, Comox Valley Head Injury Society  
Jaqui Mendes, Executive Director, Community Legal Assistance Society  
Jennifer Metcalfe, Executive Director, Prisoners' Legal Services  
Jessie Niikoi, Chairperson, BC Federation of Students  
Carla Pellegrini, Executive Director, Food Stash Foundation  
Katya Potapova, Operations Director, Bakau Consulting Inc.  
Karen Ranalletta, President, CUPE BC  
Shirley-Ann Reid, President, Delta Housing Be Mine Society  
Bev Ross, Caregiver  
Jeremy Ross-McElroy, Citizen  
Michelle Schmidt, Executive Director, Autism Community Training Society  
Kathy Scull  
SWAN Vancouver  
Spencer van Vloten, Editor, BCDisability.com  
Stephen von Sychowski, President, Vancouver & District Labour Council  
Annelies Tjebbes, Executive Director, Roots & Rivers Consulting  
Matt Toma, CPA  
Karla Verschoor, Executive Director, Inclusion BC  
Jennifer Watt, Parent of a person with a disability  
Deirdre Whalen, President, Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition  
West Coast Leaf