

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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March 15, 2021

Honourable John Horgan
Premier of the Executive Council
Via Email Only: premier@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Mitzi Dean
Minister of Children and Family Development
Via Email Only: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Nicholas Simons
Minister of Social Development Poverty
Reduction
Via Email Only: SDPR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honourable Selina Robinson
Minister of Finance
Via Email Only: FIN.Minister@gov.bc.ca

OPEN LETTER: Call to Reinstate the \$300-Per-Month COVID-19 Supplement and Raise BC Income and Disability Assistance Rates

Dear Premier and Ministers,

We are writing with respect to Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) Resolution 2021-16 “Support for the Permanent Reinstatement of the \$300-Per-Month COVID-19 Crisis Supplement,” which was presented, affirmed and endorsed by consensus at the UBCIC Chiefs Council on February 25, 2021 (enclosed).

As you are aware, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has presented financial challenges and other barriers to wellbeing that not only disproportionately impact persons with disabilities and low-income individuals, but also exacerbate the interconnected social crises that are harming Indigenous lives, including homelessness, substance abuse, intergenerational trauma, and mental health issues. Sadly, rather than implementing the necessary measures to support those most vulnerable and marginalized in our communities, the government has chosen to claw-back the \$300-per-month COVID-19 Crisis Supplement to social assistance rates that was introduced on April 22, 2020. As pre-COVID social assistance rates did not even lift people above BC’s official poverty line, the COVID supplement was a vital support that had tangible and critical impacts; persons with disabilities and impoverished individuals and families relied upon every dollar to afford basic necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and internet.

Consequently, by UBCIC Resolution 2021-16, the UBCIC Chiefs Council joins community members, advocates, and organizations in supporting the 300 to Live Campaign, the movement launched by a coalition of disabled and neurodivergent people to lobby the provincial government to maintain the \$300/month increase to social assistance rates, and to permanently raise income assistance rates to at least the poverty line, indexed for inflation. The UBCIC Chiefs Council urges you to not only implement these

vital measures, but to support the recent report and recommendations released by the B.C. Basic Income Panel on January 28, 2021. This expert panel identified 65 recommendations that are aimed at revitalizing an outdated and stagnant social assistance framework. We urge you to take immediate action to implement these vital recommendations, including raising disabilities rates by \$500 per month to reach the poverty line, making the \$300 pandemic top-up permanent, providing extended health-care benefits to all low-income individuals, and enhancing financial and support services for young adults and youth in care.

We remind you that prior to your government's election in 2017, the previous government had frozen basic social assistance rates at \$610/month for nearly a decade, effectively fortifying the barriers confronting persons with disabilities and impoverished people. In addition, since 2007 there have been no increases to the \$375-per-month shelter allowance given to people with disabilities to pay for rent and housing – a fact that is particularly alarming given that rental and living costs in B.C. have soared since then. The UBCIC Chiefs Council impresses upon you the urgent need to immediately begin working to implement the \$300 to Live Campaign and BC Basic Income Panel's directives and recommendations, including prioritizing the permanent installation of the \$300-per-month COVID-19 supplement.

We hope you will safeguard the health and safety of Indigenous people, especially our Elders, on income and disability assistance who are fighting hard to overcome the added challenges of the pandemic, while also struggling to fulfill their basic living needs.

We look forward to your response.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President



Chief Don Tom
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: UBCIC Chiefs Council
300 to Live
Disability Alliance BC

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UNION OF B.C. INDIAN CHIEFS CHIEFS COUNCIL FEBRUARY 24TH-25TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MEETING

Resolution no. 2021-16

RE: Support for the Permanent Reinstatement of the \$300-Per-Month COVID-19 Crisis Supplement

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have far-reaching and disproportionate impacts on vulnerable and marginalized communities in B.C., and Indigenous communities are facing new and intensified barriers to their wellbeing, including those related to healthcare, employment, housing, justice, and gendered violence;

WHEREAS on April 22, 2020 the NDP government issued a temporary \$300-per-month COVID-19 Crisis Supplement to social assistance rates – for a total of \$1,060 a month for a single person and \$1,483 a month for someone with a disability – with the intent of helping approximately 205,000 British Columbians on income and disability assistance and 58,000 low-income seniors;

WHEREAS the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the government of Canada has adopted without qualification, and has, alongside the government of B.C., committed to implement, affirms:

Article 21(1): Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security;

(2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities;

Article 22(1): Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration;

WHEREAS on December 9, 2020, the NDP government announced that it would cut the \$300 benefit in half for the next three months before its termination in April 2021. While the supplement still leaves social

assistance rates below the poverty line, the supplement has had tangible, critical impacts for many disabled, neurodivergent, and impoverished people who rely upon every dollar to afford basic necessities such as food, medicine, and shelter, as well as additional expenses related to the pandemic, including personal protective equipment, transportation, and internet and cellular connectivity;

WHEREAS many organizations and advocates have rallied around the “[300 to Live](#)” campaign, a movement launched by a coalition of disabled and neurodivergent people to call upon the provincial government to:

1. Maintain the \$300/month increase to income and disability assistance rates;
2. Permanently raise income assistance rates to at least the poverty line, indexed to inflation; and
3. Ensure that increases to income assistance and disability assistance include a clear, earmarked increase to the shelter portion;

WHEREAS an expert panel on basic income struck by the NDP government in 2018 released a [500-page report](#) on January 28, 2021 that contained 65 recommendations to improve the efficacy and benefits of existing social programs, including recommendations to raise disabilities rates by \$500 per month to reach the poverty line, to make the \$300 pandemic top-up permanent, to provide extended health-care benefits to all low-income individuals, and to enhance financial and support services for young adults and youth in care;

WHEREAS prior to the NDP government’s election in 2017, the previous government had frozen basic social assistance rates at \$610/month for nearly a decade, effectively fortifying the barriers confronting disabled and impoverished people, and since 2007 there have been no increases to the \$375-per-month shelter allowance given to people with disabilities to pay for rent and housing – a fact that is particularly alarming given that rental and living costs in B.C. have soared since then, and many single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels in Vancouver charge \$800 for a room;

WHEREAS the current insufficient social assistance rates do not consider the full spectrum of challenges disabled and low-income individuals must confront, including the financial challenges and living restrictions created by COVID-19, and serves to exacerbate other social crises that are harming Indigenous lives, including intergenerational trauma, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues; and

WHEREAS by Resolution 2012-41, the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly called upon Canada to increase funding towards social assistance programs for First Nations Elders, pensioners, and those with disabilities in order to ensure their basic living requirements are met and that comprehensive support is accessible and readily supplied.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs Council acknowledges that the \$300-per-month COVID-19 crisis supplement has been vital for First Nations and especially Elders on income and disability assistance who are at higher risk of contracting severe COVID-19, and rely on the funds to overcome the added challenges of the pandemic while still fulfilling their basic living requirements;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs Council fully supports the “300 to Live” campaign and the calls to action advanced by the coalition of disabled and neurodivergent people to the provincial government, including the call to permanently install the \$300-per-month COVID-19 crisis supplement;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED UBCIC Chiefs Council fully supports the B.C. Basic Income Panel’s 65 recommendations that are aimed at revitalizing an outdated and stagnant social assistance framework and ensuring social assistance rates are suitably raised to meet the needs of disabled, neurodivergent, and low-income populations;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs Council condemns any reductions in social assistance funds and programs that support the most vulnerable populations, and calls upon the provincial government to immediately begin working to address and implement the \$300 to Live Campaign's key directives and the BC Basic Income Panel's 65 recommendations, including prioritizing the permanent installation of the \$300 social assistance supplement; and

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the UBCIC Chiefs Council directs the UBCIC Executive and staff to work with other like-minded organizations to advance the current issues around social assistance rates, including communicating to Premier John Horgan and the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction the critical need to make the \$300-per-month supplement permanent.

Moved: Chief Byron Louis, Okanagan Indian Band

Seconded: Chief Ralph Leon, Sts'ailes

Disposition: Carried

Date: February 25, 2021