

Open letter to Premier Gordon Campbell,

We, the undersigned British Columbians, implore you to act now to improve the health and living conditions of BC's poorest people: the homeless, people receiving welfare, and low wage workers.

Welfare rates have been frozen or cut since 1994 (with the exception of one modest increase to disability rates). A single person who is required to look for work gets only \$510 a month. \$325 of this is for shelter and goes directly to the landlord.

The Provincial Health Officer's *Annual Report 2005* says, "Families and individuals on social assistance in BC have little or no money after paying for shelter to purchase food and other necessities."

Your government must increase both the shelter and support parts of income assistance rates by at least 50% in the upcoming provincial budget.

Many people cannot get welfare and are living in harsh, desperate circumstances in our streets, alleyways and parks. A major reason that homelessness doubled between 2002 and 2005 is that your government made welfare much harder to get. *We urge you to end arbitrary barriers to welfare that deny help to people in dire need.*

Dr. Bruce Alexander, Dept. of Psychology, SFU

Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford

Ronald Awai, President, British Columbia Retired Teachers' Association

Shawn Bayes, Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver

BC Persons with AIDS Society

Dr. John Bogardus, Dept. of Anthropology, SFU

Rev. Dr. Daniel Bogert-O'Brien, Squamish United Church

Carnegie Action Project

Nancy A. Chiavario, President, Mt. Pleasant Community Centre Association

Michael Clague, Former Director of Carnegie Community Centre

June Clearsky, Vancouver Status of Women

Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Professor, SFU

Dave Diewert, Professor, Regent College

David Eby, Pivot Legal Society

Dr. Steven Epperson, Parish Minister, Unitarian Church of Vancouver

David Green, Professor, Dept. of Economics, UBC

Jim Green

Sneja Gunew, Centre for Women's & Gender Studies, UBC

Penny Gurstein, Professor, School of Community & Regional Planning, UBC

Dr. Budd Hall, Director, Office of Community-Based Research, UVic

Miki Hansen, AIDS Vancouver Island

Lisa Helps, Trudeau Scholar on Homelessness

George Heyman, President, BC Government & Service Employees' Union

Rebecca Johnson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, UVic

Kamloops & District Labour Council

Henry Kamphof, Executive Director, Capital Region Housing Corporation

Nancy Keough, Kettle Friendship Society

Seth Klein, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Martha Lewis, Tenants' Rights Action Coalition

Henri Lock, Chaplain, UVic Interfaith Services

Cynthia Low, Downtown Eastside Women's Centre

Dr. Margaret MacGregor, Family Physician, Mid-Main Community Health Centre

Curtis Magnuson, Social Work Instructor, University College of the Fraser Valley

Rev. Margaret Marquardt, Justice & Peace Unit of the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster

Thousands of other British Columbians, those working at or near the \$8 an hour minimum wage, cannot escape poverty. A full-time minimum wage worker earns less than the poverty line. At the \$6 an hour starting wage, a full-time worker earns only about 60% of the poverty line. *We ask your government to increase the minimum wage immediately to at least \$10 an hour, and abolish the \$6 starting wage.*

Making these changes would reduce panhandling, binning and homelessness, and would save money on future social service, health and law enforcement costs.

According to costing by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, these policy changes could be accomplished for \$700 million — a fraction of the projected budget surplus.

In our wealthy province, in this time of prosperity, we shouldn't be counting the number of sleeping people on our streets, families using food banks, or children coming to school hungry. ~ Signed,

Adrienne Montani, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition

Rev. B.K. Morris

Fred Muzin, President, Hospital Employees' Union

Eyob Naizghi, Working Group on Poverty

Nanaimo & District Labour Council

Phyllis Nash, President, BC Association of Social Workers

Susan Noakes, Together Against Poverty Society

North Okanagan Labour Council

Cindy Oliver, President, Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC

Karen O'Shannacery, Lookout Society

Andrea Ottem, Registered Dietitian

Miriam Palacios, Oxfam Canada

Bernie Pauly, School of Nursing, UVic

Dr. Ana Maria Peredo, Faculty of Business, UVic

Kerry Porth, Prostitution, Alternatives, Counseling & Education Society

Prince George & District Labour Council

Mabel Jean Rawlins-Brannan, Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria

Dr. Marge Reitsma-Street, Professor in Studies in Policy and Practice, UVic

Graham Riches, Director, UBC School of Social Work

Andy Ross, President, COPE Local 378 SFU Teaching Support Staff Union

Jinny Sims, President, BC Teachers' Federation

Jim Sinclair, President, BC Federation of Labour

Squamish & District Labour Council

Judith Staples, Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre

Mary Lynn Stewart, Dept. of Women's Studies, SFU

Emily Sutherland, Vice President, Burnaby Teachers Association

Dr. David Suzuki

Mamie Hutt Temoana, Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver

Tim Vares, John Howard Society of the Lower Mainland

Joe Wai, Architect

Bruce Wallace, Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group

Gloria Wolfson, Director, School of Social Work & Human Services, University College of the Fraser Valley

Rev. Dr. Ruth Wright, Executive Director, First United Church

And many others concerned about poverty and homelessness in BC.

You can take action to reduce poverty. Visit www.raisetherates.org, or call 604-729-2380.

Raise the Rates Coalition