



City of Maple Ridge News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2015 #15-10

For further information, contact:
Shawn Matthewson at 604-467-7464
smatthewson@mapleridge.ca

Maple Ridge UBCM Resolution Becomes Part of 2015 Provincial Budget

Maple Ridge, BC: In September of 2014, Maple Ridge submitted a Resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities advocating that the Province of BC provide an Income Exemption for Child Support Payments for families on income or disability assistance. On Tuesday, February 17, 2015 Finance Minister Mike de Jong delivered the 2015 Provincial Budget which included an announcement that as of September 1, 2015 parents will be able to keep all the money they get from an ex-spouse if they are on income and disability assistance.

“This is great news for families who are struggling to raise families under tough circumstances. For those of us who were recently elected to serve the community it’s an important reminder that the work that we began a week ago to develop resolutions for the Lower Mainland Local Government Association (LMLGA) can have a huge impact on policy decisions at the Provincial and Federal level,” said Mayor Nicole Read. “It also speaks to the role that the Social Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) plays in our community. I understand that they worked closely with the past Council to develop the resolution and background information. We are very proud to see an initiative brought forward by Maple Ridge embedded in the new budget of our Province. The impacts of this local work will be felt around all of BC”

The 2014 resolution presented at the annual UBCM Conference in September read;

Income Exemption for Child Support Payments: Maple Ridge

Whereas, one out of seven children in BC live in poverty and the poverty rate for children headed by lone-parent families is one of the highest poverty rates of any family type.

And whereas, the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation claws back child support payments dollar for dollar although the financial loss to families far outweighs the gains for the Ministry. It is recognized child support payments are the right of the child.

Therefore be it resolved that the Provincial Government amend the Employment and Assistance Regulation and the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Regulation to add an unearned income exemption for child support payments up to \$300 per family unit per month.

The background information provided with the resolution noted that;

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Canada's promise to end child poverty. In this past quarter century whole generations of British Columbian children have grown up, yet far too many of them have been hampered in reaching their full potential by growing up in poverty.

BC has experienced persistently high rates of child poverty since 2002. In the annual Child Poverty Report Card released by First Call in November 2014, it was identified that one out of every five children in BC are living in poverty. Although poverty affects all family types it was identified in the Child Poverty Report Card that a whopping 49.5% of children living in lone-parent families live in poverty. 81% of these children are being raised by lone-mothers.

Since 2002, court ordered child support payments to parents on income assistance are deducted from their income assistance payments dollar to dollar thereby reducing costs to government.

It is a fundamental principle of family law that children have a right to support from their parents. The right endures any breakdown in the child's parent's relationship and a child of separated parents has the right to receive support from the non-custodial parent. The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed that child support is the right of the child not the custodial parent.

In January 2013, almost 18,000 single parent families received income assistance in BC. Seventy percent of those families received temporary income assistance (the category of assistance with the lowest rates—the base rate for a single parent with one child is \$945.58). According to the Ministry of Social Development, approximately 4,000 of these families received child support payments that were then deducted from their income assistance payments dollar for dollar.

The Ministry has said it collects approximately 15 million dollars in child support payments which is deducted from the funds provided to income assistance recipients each year. This represents less than 1% of the Ministry's total budget for income assistance. However, for the 4,000 families receiving child support payments this would add an extra \$3,750 to their annual budget, a significant amount for families living in poverty.

The Ministry does not pay the majority of child benefits. The financial support that families receive for children comes from the National Child Tax Benefit. Shelter costs provided through the Ministry increase according to family size, however, income assistance or disability benefits do not increase with the number of children in a family. Families receive minimal support for their children via the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, yet this Ministry deducts child support payments from the benefits it pays out.

Steven Lamothe, Chair of the Social Planning Advisory Committee said "This is a big step in moving toward the goal of eliminating child poverty in Canada. The Social Planning Advisory Committee works on promoting policies that alleviate poverty. This is great news for all children and families in Maple Ridge."

As part of the budget announcement Minister de Jong said "This means an additional \$32 million over three years for some of the neediest children and families in British Columbia." The budget documents presented in the Legislature on Tuesday noted that this program would benefit approximately 3,200 families and 5,400 children on income and disability assistance.

For more information about the resolution or the Social Planning Advisory Committee please contact Shawn Matthewson at smatthewson@mapleridge.ca or by calling 604-467-7464.