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To: Moms on the Move

Sent: Sunday, February 25, 2007 10:02 PM

Subject: URGENT: New Community Living agencies' proposal to close 100 group homes, downgrade most of the rest...

URGENT: Please share with families and self advocates currently in or trying to get a group home or other residential community living placement

The attached is a new version of the recent proposal from CLBC's CEO to sector unions that was recently leaked and withdrawn after drawing instant fire. The proposed deal covers staffing changes under a sweeping transition that seeks to dismantle the core of BC's community living system. It raises alarming questions about the integrity and good faith of recent assertions from the Minister and CLBC. Contrary to their repeated denials of plans to close group homes, the stated purpose of the proposed deal is precisely that -- i.e. to help CLBC close or convert potentially all or most group homes to unlicensed, poorly-regulated, informal and/or sweatshop care arrangements that will be unsuitable and unsafe for many adults, while doing little to resolve waitlists.

This time, the proposal supposedly comes from CSSEA, the bargaining agent for contracted agencies that deliver community living services locally for CLBC (The other party, CSSBA, represents sector unions). It is virtually identical to the proposal first floated by CLBC's Rick Mowles, with a few clarifications.

Since both agencies and unions were reportedly up in arms over the first leaked proposal just a few weeks ago, this begs a few questions: **Do agencies and caregivers really see this benefitting the vulnerable individuals whom they serve? Why is CLBC pushing a plan that appears to contravene the best interests of those it serves? If not CLBC, will agencies and unions alert the community to what's underway?** This document (from an insider who clearly did want to alert people) adds more evidence that families and self-advocates are being misled about a transition already underway. They're being shut out from planning that could have significant negative impacts and deserve some straight answers from their agencies, BCACL, CLBC and especially Minister Christensen, who's ultimately holding all the strings.

Here are some elements of the proposal that families and self advocates may want to ask about:

1. The proposed deal outlines changes to the collective agreement "**to address the transition of services from unionised residential staffed facilities to new models of service delivery.**" (i.e. from group homes to other models.)

- **Questions:**
- **Why are CLBC, agencies and unions negotiating labour terms of a transition that CLBC and the Minister keep denying is happening or envisioned?**
- Why are they planning a transition **from** licenced group homes when the Minister and CLBC keep insisting that the transition underway is about promoting choice, not closing group homes?
- Why a transition **from** licenced group homes when results so far from the Minister's \$1.7 million Residential Options Review confirm that at least 90% of group home residents and their families don't think other models are suitable and don't want to move; and when no one has yet asked what the 2,000 people in other settings or the 3,000+ more on waitlists would choose?
- Don't initial results of the review and growing waitlists suggest a need to plan for more group homes (and everything else), not less?

2. The document states that up to 100 of BC's 680 group homes will be closed, with residents transitioned to the following new models:

- a) **Home living:** (aka family model, pri care or adult foster care): one or more individuals (persons with DD) own or rent accommodation from a family or single homeowner who provide the care.
- b) **Roommate:** one or more individual own/rent an apartment with a live-in caregiver roommate.
- c) **Cluster:** one or more individuals own/rent clustered apartments; caregiver lives in a nearby apartment
- d) **Semi-independent living:** one or more individual owns/rents apartment or suite separate from caregiver (e.g. rents basement suite, caregiver lives upstairs).
- e) Other unidentified models along these lines

Unionized group home employees will have the option of transferring to unionized jobs in these new models (talk about bringing your work home!), but on very different terms than their current jobs.

Background:

The above models were enabled in the 2002 *Community Services Labour Relations Act*. Unlike group homes, they aren't subject to licensing standards and inspections. Since 2002, persistent reports suggested a backroom plan to cut costs/enhance

flexibility by closing group homes and moving to unlicensed, non-union care with lower standards, wages & union restrictions. These were consistently denied with claims that it was just about promoting choice.

Potential glitches to that plan include the growing crisis facing non-union providers-- i.e. little hope of finding more people willing to work for less. CLBC's own belated research also showed no evidence that these alternatives would deliver savings or other benefits (there went the argument that people "choosing" alternatives would at least produce savings that could ease waitlists!). Then the residential options review found most people did not want to leave their group homes. Meanwhile, CLBC needed a solution to the costly employee grievances being filed each time they tried to close a unionized home.

I'm no expert on labour issues but this proposed deal sure looks like CLBC offering to protect union jobs and agency contracts in exchange for their cooperation in diluting quality of care. For agencies, the warnings have been blunt--cooperate or we'll give your contract to someone else who couldn't care less. It's a mind-bending twist to CLBC's constant lectures about person-centred thinking. What's certainly lacking in this deal-making is someone to speak independently for or think in a person-centred way about the interests of those at the heart of it all!

3. In addition to the above closures, any group home with three or fewer residents may be converted to a "community residence". Staff at such homes will have to work shifts up to 16-hours, possibly up to 24-hour shifts, and/or more than 40 hours per week.

This totally undermines CLBC's public reassurances that nobody will be forced to move. CLBC has never publicly mentioned this new model or suggested that those who choose to stay in their group homes could simply have the model changed under their feet. The staffing suggestions raise considerable alarm and there's no telling what other features this new model might offer, since searches of CLBC's Service Plan and Website turn up not a single reference to this model.

Currently, almost 300 of the 680 group homes have three or fewer residents. CLBC's current policy of leaving group home spaces empty when someone leaves means that number will grow. **This transition therefore envisions the closure or conversion of up to 2/3 or perhaps even far more of BC's existing group homes.**

More questions:

- CLBC and the Minister have publicly committed to respect the choices made by individuals and families participating in good faith in the current Residential Options Review. Why would CLBC privately propose changes that violate those commitments?
- Is the Minister aware of the transition addressed by CLBC's proposal, which so clearly contradicts the Minister's and CLBC's commitment to choice, person-centred services & helping people "identify the residential support that works best for them."

- If more than 90% of interviewees in the residential options review so far chose group homes as the most suitable model, how is CLBC's plan to eliminate (i.e. transition from) this model respectful of or consistent with the best interests of the individuals it exists to serve?
- Why is CLBC not being forthright about its intended "transition" away from group homes - i.e. publicly claiming that it's just promoting choice while privately planning how to eliminate the very model that most people choose?
- Why is CLBC planning to transition from group homes to these other models after the study they commissioned showed no clear evidence of cost savings or quality of life benefits anywhere in the world where this has been attempted?
- How does this provide capacity to meet the diverse needs of 3,000+ adults and young adults and aging families desperately waiting for a suitable home?
- How many of the 2,000 individuals in alternate models are already in crisis and needing to be moved back to a more formal professionally-staffed home?
- Why are CLBC, agencies and unions discussing terms of a planned transition to an unknown, unspecified and untried new model (community residences) that no one has ever announced or discussed with families, self advocates or the broader public?
- Is a community residence just a group home with no licensing, lower standards and less staff?
- What did CLBC's new Community Councils who are supposed to represent families and self-advocates say about this plan? Were they even consulted?
- Do BC's community agencies and BCACL really support this proposal presented in their name by CSSEA? What do staff and/or their unions think?
- And finally, **where does the Minister stand on this?** He sets overall direction and budget, his office ordered the Residential Options Review and he is ultimately responsible for CLBC's actions and for the safety and wellbeing of those affected. Given the assurances he has made to the public and to families, his personal integrity is also on the line.