

May 5, 2005

The Honourable Lucienne Robillard  
Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Robillard,

On behalf of Multiple Births Canada (MBC), I would like to extend my sincere best wishes to you in your role as Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. MBC listened with much interest to the mention of the government's ongoing commitment to a review of the *Employment Insurance* program in the recent March Budget announcements. The potential to inform and influence this review is of great importance to our organization, and with your indulgence, we would like to offer some comments that may further inform you of our unique perspective on parenting and child rearing, and make some suggestions for your review.

We are an organization that has supported multiple-birth families for twenty-seven years. MBC is the only national, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to improving the quality of life for multiple-birth individuals and their families in Canada. Our mandate includes work in the following areas:

- Improving access to support, resources, and informed care for multiples and their families
- Building strong member chapters across Canada
- Educating the health, education and academic communities of the challenges facing multiples and their families so that these challenges are considered when undertaking research
- Encouraging government and service providers to recognize the unique needs of multiples and their families and to provide appropriate services to them

With medical advances, particularly in the areas of infertility and newborn care, the number of multiple-birth children is increasing. According to Statistics Canada, 90,000 multiple-birth children (averaging more than 9,000 births per year since 1999) were born between 1993 and 2002. There are approximately 150,000 Canadian multiple-birth children under the age of 20.

Compared to singletons, multiple-birth infants are at higher risk of death and illness during the prenatal period and in their first few months because they are often pre-term and have lower birth weights. As they grow, they are more vulnerable to long-term health problems, such as developmental delays, and behavioural problems.

In addition, the parents of multiple-birth children often experience extreme levels of physical, emotional and financial stress. This stress, in combination with the lack of access to the appropriate information and support, places multiple-birth children and their siblings at an increased risk of child abuse and neglect. While Canada has a strong social safety net, multiple-birth children, and the adults that care for them, are still under-served by the health care, employment and education systems, and social service providers.



In any family, the introduction of multiple-birth infants presents overwhelming physical, emotional and financial strains. As multiple-birth children grow, multiples and their families face special challenges in school, in social situations, as well as increased chance of health complications. As such, both supporting and improving the capacity for the parents of these children to cope is a top priority for our organization.

The proposal of a review to the *Employment Insurance* program, which would include the sections on maternity, parental, and compassionate care leave, has signalled an opportunity for the Government of Canada to make a real commitment to addressing the particular issues faced by parents with multiple-birth children. Specifically, with regard to compassionate care, we would recommend including incidents of preterm and low birth weight to the current eligibility criteria and recommend extending the period of available leave beyond six weeks.

With reference to maternity leave and parental leave, we would recommend extending the amount of leave for all incidences of multiple-births. As we have not completed our research into the matter, we cannot recommend an ideal period of leave at this time, but would apply a general rule of one year per newborn. This is based on the fact that had they been born individually, this parent would be entitled to one year's leave per child, under current *EI* provisions. We are aware of a number of precedents, set in various countries that may be helpful to you (please see Annex A for a summary table, and Annexes B and C for recent reports). MBC's view is that current provisions for leave under *EI* are not sufficient, and not equitable due to the extended physical and emotional demands placed on these families. These annexes describe programs in other countries as examples – we believe that Canada needs to and will find its own way to accommodate multiple births.

We believe that working together with parents, professionals, related organizations, and governments is essential in order to prevent or limit challenges related to multiple births. We would warmly welcome the opportunity to work together to further the review to the *EI* program, in the capacity you deem most valuable, whether through consultations, or meeting with your officials.

In addition, we would like to extend to you an invitation to the launch of MBC's National Multiple Births Awareness Day, to be held May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005. With the blessing of Annette and Cécile Dionne, we will inaugurate this event at the Dionne Quints Museum in North Bay, Ontario. It would be an honour to welcome you there, and to introduce you to some of our invaluable volunteers and some of our member families. We also include, for your information, a copy of our quarterly newsletter, *Multiple Moments*, and some details about the National Multiple Births Awareness Day.

Yours very truly,

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