

March 22, 2006

The Honourable Diane Finley  
Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Canada  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Finley,

On behalf of Multiple Births Canada (MBC), I would like to extend our best wishes to you in your new role as Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and to introduce our organization to you.

We are an organization that has supported multiple-birth families for twenty-eight 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 throughout Canada. MBC is entirely unsubsidized, and raises its operational funding through memberships and sales of publications. 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 and making policy decisions
- Encouraging government and service providers to recognize the unique needs of multiples and their families and to provide appropriate services to them

The introduction of multiple-birth infants presents overwhelming physical, emotional and financial strains in any family. As multiple-birth children grow, multiples and their families face special challenges in school, and in social situations, as well as increased risk 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. To compare the experience of caring for a single-born child to that of caring for multiples ignores the greater demands placed on multiple-birth parents, including more complicated health issues and longer bonding times.

### **Our concerns about Employment Insurance**

In November 2005, we had the opportunity to meet with a senior advisor in your predecessor's office, to present our views on the urgent need for a review of the *Employment Insurance* Program. At that meeting, we agreed to solicit our membership and provide HRSDC officials with a list of MBC priorities for change. Please find below the results of this survey.

#### ***The top three priorities for change for multiple-birth families are:***

- 1. Increase parental leave – currently 35 weeks, should be extended by 35 weeks for each additional multiple birth baby, which could be taken by one parent, or shared between the two, with breaks permitted (66 per cent of respondents surveyed chose this option as their first or second choice).***

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2. **Increase maternity leave** – currently 15 weeks, should be extended to 25-30 weeks for all incidences of multiple births (47 per cent of respondents made this their first or second choice)
3. **Increase benefit higher than 55%** – maximum allowable payment should be raised to at least 70-75 per cent of insurable earnings (41 per cent of respondents made this their first or second choice)

These priorities speak to the direct and genuine needs of Canadian multiple-birth families, and to the crucial supports that we believe can enable and sustain Canadians through their first years of parenting, resulting in stronger, healthier families, and communities now and in the future.

While these priorities were the top three chosen by those surveyed, the fourth priority emphasized was the need to extend program eligibility to individuals (e.g. self-employed Canadians) who are excluded from the program. Because the maternity/parental leave policies of the federal government are ensconced in the *EI* program, many Canadians, including self-employed parents of multiple-birth children, do not have access to these benefits. We feel strongly that all multiple-birth families deserve access to the full range of leave supports under the *EI* program, in addition to those that qualify based on labour force participation criteria.

While Canadian families require the freedom to make their own choices with regards to parenting, often they cannot do it alone. They need the support of their government. We believe that working together with parents, professionals, related organizations, the private sector, and governments is essential to a proactive and integrated approach that will enable parents to face the unique challenges related to multiple-births, and that can reduce costs to the health system significantly. We warmly welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further review the results of our survey and discuss changes to the *EI* program, in the capacity you deem most valuable, whether through consultations, or meeting with your officials.

We include in Annex A, additional background information, including some information about family leave policies in other countries. We also include, for your information, two different issues of our quarterly newsletter, *Multiple Moments*, and the survey form we distributed to our membership.

Finally, we would like to extend to you an invitation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual **National Multiple Births Awareness Day**, to be held May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006, in Chatham, Ontario. It would be an honour to welcome you there, and to introduce you to some of our invaluable volunteers and member families.

Yours very truly,



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