

March 13, 2008

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

Dear Minister Solberg:

On behalf of Multiple Births Canada (MBC), I would like to apologize for not getting this letter to you sooner. It was our intent to give you a year to get settled in with your new portfolio, and then to contact you this spring with this information. However, a CBC news story in Calgary this week is filtering across Canada and suggests that we alter our plans and send you this information package today.

Since 2005, MBC has been in correspondence with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Canada to create awareness of the need to review EI maternity and parental benefits for multiple-birth families. We attach that communication to this letter as Annex A. But, first here is a brief background on MBC.

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 and we have been doing so for 30 years. MBC receives no government funding at this time and raises its operational funding through memberships, sales of publications, the occasional grant from Ontario Trillium Foundation, and through small donations and sponsorships. 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. The following are the results of that solicitation.



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).
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 about 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 B 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.

Yours very truly,



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