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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In the time of COVID-19, more is needed to care for vulnerable children

Ottawa, ON – The federal government's economic measures announced this week to support Canadians as they begin to feel the impact of COVID-19 are welcomed. But child welfare and anti-poverty advocates say they do not go far enough and call for these measures to be significantly bolstered. Governments must ensure all residents are protected from poverty and have the support they need to appropriately care for their families.

No matter where children are, they need our full support.

Now is the time to implement an increase to the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) that brings all family incomes with children up to the age of 18 to the Low Income Measure threshold (after tax).

"The CCB is one of the most important instruments of child poverty reduction," said Leila Sarangi, National Coordinator of Campaign 2000. "Government has announced a \$300 increase to the CCB maximum payment per child, which represents a 4.5 percent increase, significantly less than the 15 percent increase they were promising for children under the age of one just a few weeks ago," Sarangi said.

Government should **immediately remove barriers and provide supports to access the CCB benefit** for families living at higher rates of poverty including First Nations families on reserve, children whose parents have irregular immigration status, women in shelters who have experienced violence, parents with joint custody and kinship families caring for children of incarcerated parents.

The Government has also announced a top up to the GST averaging close to \$400 for single adults and \$600 for couples. Individuals will have to wait for these funds and it will not be enough. It's time to **implement a new targeted Dignity Dividend to provide \$1,800 per adult and per child** for those living below the poverty line. The Dignity Dividend would top up the GST credit to lift 450,000 people out of poverty, half of whom are children. This benefit is described in the [2020 Alternative Federal Budget](#), released earlier this week.

Inequalities that existed previous to this global pandemic are being amplified – children, youth and families in vulnerable situations are carrying a disproportionate burden of

insecurity and risk. **Canada should also immediately comply with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling and end discriminatory funding of child welfare services on reserve.**

“All efforts should be made to ensure biological families, customary care families, kinship and foster families have the resources they need to care for children and youth.” said Rachel Gouin, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of Canada. “When families experience difficulties such as poverty, intimate partner violence, mental health issues, and substance abuse with few social supports children suffer greatly, especially in times of crisis.”

These are our **key recommendations** to protect vulnerable children and families for pandemic response:

CANADA CHILD BENEFIT

- Cut the red tape that prevents children from receiving federal benefits by having different parts of government connect to obtain the information required for caregivers to access benefits for children, such as birth certificates. Expand the circle of people able to attest to residency to include charities, so that impoverished families with children too young for school can meet the requirement for federal benefits.
- Set delivery standards, so all children get the same access to federally funded support no matter where they live.
- Amend the Income Tax Act by repealing s.122.6 (e) which ties eligibility for the CCB to the immigration status of the applicant parent.
- Eliminate all wait times for the CCB and ensure families have immediate access to this benefit.
- Provide easy web and telephone access to report decreases in income and adjust the benefit paid without delay.

DIGNITY DIVIDEND

- Functioning like the GST credit, immediately implement a Dignity Dividend of \$1800 for each adult and child living on low incomes so that they have the necessary incomes to meet their needs.

BENEFITS FOR WORKERS IMPACTED BY COVID-19

- Ensure a weekly minimum payment of \$573 for all financial support programs during the pandemic and its aftermath, whether administered through EI regular and special benefits, the Emergency Care Benefit or the yet-to-be released

COVID-19 Emergency Support Benefit for workers who cannot access EI. \$573 is the maximum weekly benefit under current EI rules.

ACCESS TO BENEFITS

- Implement strategies to ensure that people living in First Nations, remote communities, and people with low incomes who do not have internet and personal computers have alternate access to application processes, such as telephone options.
- The tax system is not universal. Government needs to also develop and implement strategies to reach individuals and families who have not filed for taxes and therefore who will not have access to these benefits.
- Communications about these benefits must be accessible, in multiple languages, large font, American Sign Language and widely disseminated.
- Eliminate all wait times for all benefits so that individuals and families have access to them immediately.

CHILD CARE

- Provide special supports for child care centres so that parents are not left paying fees while services are closed.
- Work with provinces to provide safe emergency childcare for those who have to work.

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working to end child and family poverty, hosted by Family Service Toronto. For all of Campaign 2000's report cards, visit <http://www.campaign2000.ca>

Child Welfare League of Canada is a national, membership-based charitable organization that advocates for and promotes legislation, policy, research, programs, and services that address the underlying causes of precarity and trauma. We aspire for all children to thrive, to know that they are loved, and to have a sense of belonging.

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