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October 25, 2013

Honourable Dave Hancock
Minister of Human Services
Government of Alberta
224 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2N2

Dear Minister Hancock,

Re: Together We Raise Tomorrow

On behalf of the YWCA of Calgary, an organization committed to meeting the needs of women who are vulnerable and their families, I wish to offer our congratulations to you and the department on Together We Raise Tomorrow. We are heartened to see the values of our organization and those of Albertans, as echoed in the Social Policy Framework, reflected here.

The development of Together We Raise Tomorrow: Alberta's Poverty Reduction Strategy offers a unique opportunity for the Government of Alberta to pointedly address the vulnerabilities of women to periods of low income, instability and isolation.

Recognizing the specific needs of women and addressing them through an Alberta Poverty Reduction Strategy would not connote special treatment. Rather, it is an opportunity to recognize - through future policy development - historic inequities and acute vulnerabilities.

Throughout 2012 and early 2013, Calgary stakeholders came together under the leadership of a YWCA team member to consider those dimensions of the Calgary Poverty Reduction strategy which would be most critical to addressing the needs of women. We submit that the final report from that group be considered as the recommendations include opportunities for the Province to promote equitability in Alberta communities. For example the report points out ways in which income and employment policies, including labour standards and minimum wage levels, do not account for the over-representation of women in part-time, unstable and temporary positions.

On page 7 of the Together We Raise Tomorrow discussion paper, it is stated that: "Poverty rates differ only slightly between single men and women." While we do not dispute this statistic, it does obscure the reality that women head 80 per cent of lone parent households. Further, given the continued wage gap between women and men, single fathers earn an average of \$20,000 per year more than single mothers. The linkage between a child's risk to living in poverty to that of his mother is inextricable.

Indigenous women, women of colour, lesbian and transgendered women, older women and those living with a disability face deeper challenges. Systemic racism continues to leave First Nations, Inuit and Metis women as well as immigrant women and women of colour disadvantaged with regards to seeking housing and employment. The phenomenon of "grey divorce" also leaves women at risk as those who provided primary childcare for years may now find themselves single in their 50s or 60s with limited employment skills and pension prospects far lower than those of their former spouses.

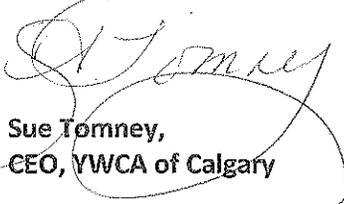
We urge the province to commit to overt diversity analysis, including the application of a gendered lens, through the development of the poverty reduction strategy and subsequent policies.

With regard to the Together We Raise Tomorrow work related to early childhood development, the YWCA has a particular interest given our work with more than 3,000 children in 2012 across our program areas. These include our Parent Link Corridor (offered in partnership with CUPS Health Education and Housing and Calgary Family Services), two accredited childcare centres, our housing and shelter programs and our specialized counseling services for children exposed to family violence.

From our strong foundation in service provision we offer our support for the Alberta approach to early childhood development. In particular we would suggest that an expanded approach to parent education via services like ParentLink and a childcare approach which addresses both the number of licensed spaces and their cost, would be a significant step in addressing the needs of women and families we serve.

The YWCA of Calgary has long been a partner in addressing the needs of women and their families in the community. As policy is developed and implemented we look forward to continued opportunities to work together to create a more equitable and inclusive Alberta for all.

Sincerely,



Sue Tomney,
CEO, YWCA of Calgary

cc: Lori Van Rooijen, Board Chair, YWCA of Calgary
Hon. Sandra Jansen, Associate Minister, Family and Community Safety
Heather Collier, Director, Strategic Policy, Human Services
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