

Human Rights Denied

S. Day, M. Young, M. Buckley, G. Brodsky

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**B.C. Government Discriminates
Against Poor Single Mothers – report**

Vancouver - Four constitutional and human rights experts are issuing a report today that condemns the Government of British Columbia for its treatment of single mothers on social assistance. Shelagh Day, Margot Young, Melina Buckley and Gwen Brodsky conclude in *Human Rights Denied* that single mothers are discriminated against by the B.C. Government.

“This government’s policies are a cruel failure,” says Margot Young, Associate Professor of Law at the University of British Columbia, “and they are illegal. They stand in sharp contradiction to guarantees of equality in Canada’s *Charter*, B.C.’s *Human Rights Code* and international treaties signed by Canada.”

Human Rights Denied documents that in 2002 welfare rates for single mothers were reduced for the first time in twenty years. Single mothers do not receive enough dollars to feed themselves and their children, or to live in decent housing.

At the same time, the B.C. Government redefined single mothers as “employable” when their youngest child is three, down from seven. This means that single mothers are obligated to seek and accept work when their youngest child is not of school age.

And finding safe affordable child care has been made harder, not easier, because the government has taken millions of dollars out of child care in the province.

“Single mothers face contradictory and defeating policies,” says Melina Buckley, an expert on human rights law. “The Government says it cares about families and children, but the poorest single mothers and their children are living in desperate circumstances in our rich, booming province.

“And the Government says it cares about work, but it has not made it possible for single mothers to get and keep decent, sustaining work,” Buckley says.

Constitutional equality rights lawyer Gwen Brodsky says that the policies are discriminatory because they make worse the conditions of an already disadvantaged and vulnerable group.

“Single mothers make up more than 80 per cent of all single parents, and they are the poorest group in Canada,” says Brodsky. “They are poor because their mothering work is devalued, their paid work is undervalued, and they do not have access to adequate child care.”

“When the British Columbia Government, instead of dismantling this systemic discrimination, makes it worse, the government runs afoul of equality guarantees.”

Single mothers lead more than 20 per cent of the families with children in British Columbia and 51 percent live below the poverty line.

“This is a social crisis,” says Shelagh Day, Co-Director of the Poverty and Human Rights Centre. “For obvious reasons, social assistance is a key program for poor single mothers. Making it more punitive makes the problem worse.”

“The Government *can* design policies that respect the rights of single mothers and their children, and that raise them out of poverty and into economically independent lives. Whichever party wins the B.C. election must correct this discrimination,” says Day.

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The report can be downloaded free from [http:
www.povertyandhumanrights.org/docs/denied/pdf](http://www.povertyandhumanrights.org/docs/denied/pdf).