



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government Expels Voices of People with Disabilities and Their Families

**For more information, contact: Danielle Kelliher, Director of Communications
BC Association for Community Living (604) 777-9100 ext. 527
dkelliher@bcacl.org**

New Westminster, B.C., November 20, 2009 – BCACL is outraged at the government’s decision to repeal sections of the Community Living Authority Act that ensure people with disabilities and family members are represented on the governing board of Community Living BC, the crown agency that provides services to people with developmental disabilities. The changes, as outlined in Bill 20, passed a third reading in the legislature on Wednesday, after debate and expressed opposition to the changes by the NDP. No consultation with the community was undertaken and no notice was given to community stakeholders of this impending change.

“To say that it’s not important to have people with disabilities or family members making decisions that affect their lives is to attack the core principles of community living,” says BCACL President Rory Summers. “Government is removing power from the very people it is there to support.”

Minister Rich Coleman stated in the legislature on Wednesday that the intent of the repeal is to “enable us to make a selection to the board of members from a wider pool of individuals,” who fit the “skill set needs,” implying that direct, lived experience is not a valued skill set and that there are not family members and community living experts who also fit the professional criteria required by the board. For a vulnerable population that has been systematically discriminated against to lose its voice after so many years of progress is devastating.

CLBC defines itself as an organization that recognizes that “individuals with developmental disabilities and their families... are in the best position to understand what their needs are and how they should be met.” Families and people with disabilities want to know that important decisions that affect their lives are informed by people who understand the issues through lived experience. Having representation on non-decision-making advisory committee is nowhere near sufficient. It is absolutely imperative that people with developmental disabilities and families are represented on the CLBC board of directors.

Through their lived experiences, families in particular have a fiscally responsible business perspective that they bring to the Board table. Their knowledge of how their needs can be best met with the funds that exist is crucial to the financial sustainability of CLBC.

The Community Living Transition Steering Committee, which was appointed by this government to advise on the new approach to Community Living Support in BC, consulted more than 2,000 people in 15 communities across the province. A key element in their 2002 Report was that CLBC needed to have representation of people with disabilities and family members on the governing board. The core beliefs that drove those recommendations have not changed; in fact, they are stronger than ever. Families, people with disabilities and service providers supported the transition to CLBC in good faith with the belief that core principles as proposed by the Transition committee would be upheld. It increasingly seems that faith was misguided. BCACL calls on the government to listen to community and reverse their decision.