



**BC Association
for Community Living**

Supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families

For immediate release

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Latimer day parole decision opens a new chapter for Canadian society to understand disabilities

New Westminster, BC - The BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) respects the decision of the National Parole Board Appeal Division to grant Robert Latimer day parole.

While the decision brings to an end one chapter in the story of how Canadian society addresses the vulnerability of Canadians with disabilities, another more important one opens. It provides the much-needed opportunity for broader discussion in Canadian society about the place and worth of Canadians with disabilities who remain so vulnerable in their communities. Are we willing to accept that in Canada people with disabilities are five times more likely to face violence than people who are non disabled?

"We believe that this is a signal for us to take the time to understand that people with all sorts of disabilities have the same rights to life, dignity and respect," said Rory Summers, President of BCACL, and parent of a young man with disabilities. "Remembering the humanity in Tracy Latimer, the 12-year-old girl who lived with cerebral palsy and enjoyed many things in her life, will bring us to the question of how we recognize and value the lives of people with disabilities, those who are vulnerable and live with pain."

The Latimer case has been a very public example of that vulnerability and has provided a spotlight on majority opinion about this issue. The overwhelming public support for lenience and clemency for Latimer because of his daughter's disabilities and experience of pain begs many questions. Do Canadians place less value on the lives of people with disabilities? Or is it that the majority can empathize more directly with those who support people with disabilities, rather than those who live with a disability?

While we continue to be disappointed that Mr. Latimer has not expressed remorse for the murder of his daughter, Tracy, we see this as being symptomatic of the broader issue. Now is the time to have the deeper discussion about the right of all people to live in safe and inclusive communities and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, communities and systems in ensuring respect for the equal integrity, value and worth of the lives of Canadians with disabilities.

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An event that could facilitate just such a discussion will be a public dialogue on Safe and Inclusive Communities co-hosted by BCACL and the Canadian Association for Community Living. The free dialogue will be held on March 9, 2008 from 7:00pm - 9:00 pm at the Delta Vancouver Airport Hotel.

The dialogue will be a forum to bring together minds and hearts on how to ensure equal protection and rights to all persons in a society. Together we will share our thoughts on the issues that the death of Tracy Latimer has raised such as euthanasia and mercy killing, as well as the broader issues faced by Canadians with disabilities every day.

For more information, contact:
Harini Rajagopal, Director of Communications, BCACL
604-777-9100. Ext 527 | 778-239-9394
hrajagopal@bcacl.org | www.bcacl.org