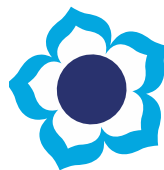


**Submission to the Select Standing Committee On  
Finance and Government Services**

**Budget 2022 Consultations**

**Submitted by**



**CUPE BC**

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**KAREN RANALLETTA, PRESIDENT**

**SEPTEMBER 30, 2021**

## CUPE BC

CUPE BC represents more than 100,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors including education, child care, community social services, community health, municipalities and local government, transit, and libraries.

We acknowledge that our province of British Columbia is located on the homelands of 203 distinct Indigenous nations and cultures; more than 30 different languages and close to 60 unique dialects are spoken in the province. We ask all participants to reflect, acknowledge and honour in their own way the First Nation land on which they live, work and play.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on priorities for the 2022 budget to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

CUPE BC represents more than 100,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors including education, child care, community social services, community health, municipalities and local government, transit, and libraries. Our members' ability to deliver quality public services and goods is greatly determined by B.C.'s provincial budget; in turn, our members are an integral part of how the province translates the budget into the public services that are foundational to strong and healthy communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made 2021 a very difficult year for people across B.C. In response, the 2022 budget must be focused on a way forward, re-envisioning how we deliver public services in a way that not only helps our communities survive, but also helps them thrive. Through these unprecedented times, our members continue to be on the ground, providing vital services that keep British Columbians safe and healthy. More than ever, the working conditions in the public sector are key to the health and prosperity of our communities and are directly impacted by budget prioritization.

Our proposals focus on high-level budget policy issues and specific pressing needs identified by our members in each sector. However, it should be noted that investments in the public sector are going to be one of the most effective strategies for economic recovery<sup>1</sup>; lower private sector investments during the pandemic have contributed to B.C.'s unemployment and underemployment. The provincial government can help fill this gap by directly investing in public services to boost employment and aid economic recovery. Moreover, investments in the public sector have "multiplier" effects on the private sector as jobs will be created in the industries that supply the necessary materials and services for the initial investment.<sup>2</sup>

We urge the government to take an intersectional lens to understand the differential impacts of the pandemic, recognizing that gender minorities, Black, Indigenous, and racialized people, women, people with disabilities, and people belonging to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have disproportionately experienced job and income loss and have suffered negative impacts to their mental health and well-being. For example, while much of the economic stimulus spending tends to favour male-dominated fields like construction, increased spending in female-dominated sectors like libraries, child care, and education is vitally important to our economic recovery and an important step toward a more equitable society.<sup>3</sup> We are optimistic that this coming budget will likewise take a progressive approach to recovery plans, looking for ways for British Columbia to move forward together in uncertain times.

# PROGRESSIVE TAXATION AND AFFORDABILITY

## BRITISH COLUMBIA HAS BEEN HIT HARD BY A CRISIS OF UNAFFORDABILITY, WHICH HAS BEEN BOTH HIGHLIGHTED AND EXACERBATED BY THE PANDEMIC.

Progressive taxation has historically been one of the great forces for stability during times of crisis. A better system of progressive taxation can help provide the resources necessary to enact the types of social spending that are essential to the economic and social recovery of our communities and ensure fair contributions from those benefiting most from a rebounding economy.

### RECOMMENDATION 1:

*Analyze the current taxation structure for the province through a progressive lens and enact taxation reform that will focus on fairness.*

Studies show that progressive taxation can have positive effects on the unemployment rate.<sup>v</sup> While B.C.'s unemployment rates across the province are largely returning to pre-pandemic rates, B.C. needs to leverage a diversity of fiscal tools to build back better. Not only will progressive taxation help the province collect the funds required to create jobs to enable people to return to the workforce, but progressive taxation can also indirectly improve aggregate employment.<sup>vi</sup> A modest increase from the current highest provincial tax rate (20.5 percent on incomes over \$222,420) would help fund government's efforts to rebuild.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

*Increase the tax rate on incomes over \$222,400 to at least 22 per cent.*

In 2018, British Columbia's Auditor General recommended more transparency on tax expenditure reporting, which totals approximately \$7 billion per year. Government should analyze the current structure of tax deductions to ensure that the system works to meet policy objectives and has remained relevant to the needs of British Columbia residents over the past two decades. There is significant opportunity to fight poverty, make life more affordable for middle income earners, and better support equity-seeking groups during B.C.'s recovery phases. British Columbia can meet progressive taxation goals through a redistribution of tax credits.

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

*Review the structure of tax exemptions and credits to ensure that it meets current progressive tax policy outcomes.*

All of us benefit when investments are made in public infrastructure; however, not all infrastructure funding models are created equal. The secrecy and lack of transparency around so-called "public private partnerships" is very troubling.

The B.C. government should be harnessing its own borrowing power to build public infrastructure and then operating that infrastructure instead of regressive models under which user fees and hefty payments from government line the pockets of corporate shareholders. Further, governments should not be allocating public funds to support private corporations in their bid to privatize the vital infrastructure and services that British Columbians rely upon every day.

Taxpayers are going to pay for these projects one way or another, and it is more advantageous to build, maintain and operate our facilities publicly. It's cheaper and provides more accountability. Let's own and control them ourselves, for the public interest and not for private profits.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4:**

***Restructure Partnerships BC to provide assistance and expertise to develop public infrastructure that is publicly financed, maintained and operated.***

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Women represent an average of just four per cent of the skilled trades workforce in B.C. and that number has barely moved in decades. Isolation, discrimination and poor workplace cultures have long been barriers for women entering and staying in the trades. Significantly increasing the number of women and other underrepresented groups in trades careers is crucial to bridging the gap, particularly given the current skilled trades labour shortage.

Economic recovery plans tend to favour male-dominated sectors. While CUPE BC is advocating for major investments in the care economy which tends to be more female dominated, it is important that we also make room for women and gender minorities in male-dominated sectors. Permanent funding for the BC Centre for Women in Trades will help ensure that investments in work in the trades are more equitable.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

***Provide permanent funding for the BC Centre for Women in Trades.***

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## **LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD AND EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS BRANCH**

**UNDER THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S MANDATE, THE LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD'S (LRB) BUDGET HAD BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY STRIPPED.**

The LRB struggles to meet and modernize its mandate and cannot deal with pressing matters in a timely fashion with sufficiently qualified personnel given its lack of funding. Without adequate funding, the prospect of meaningful change to make the LRB relevant and useful to workers' rights is not possible. Increasing funding to the LRB is also necessary to ensure that all workers have access to a fair union certification process. More Industrial Relations Officers (IROs) are necessary to ensure the certification process is carried out smoothly and that votes are conducted quickly. For example, currently due to workload IROs often do not conduct payroll audits which means that the number of employees is determined solely by what the employer reports.

Similarly, the Employment Standards Branch (ESB) is also currently failing to carry out its responsibility of ensuring that workers in B.C. receive the bare minimum for working conditions and compensation required by law. While staffing levels at the ESB have increased over the last two years, the branch is still unable to keep up with demand. The removal of the self-help kit, mediations, and complaint hearings and the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the number of complaints that the ESB is receiving and the wait times workers are experiencing to have their complaints investigated. The ESB also continues to restrict the scope of its activities, operating solely with a complaints-based model, allowing employers to resolve a complaint with one employee while continuing to exploit the rest of its workforce. Further, understaffing has created significant challenges for the collection of owed wages and penalties. In 2013-2017 alone, the ESB failed to collect \$14.9 million in owed wages. That is millions of dollars stolen from the pockets of our province's most vulnerable workers, who will never see their hard-earned

wages. Increased funding is desperately needed to shepherd the ESB back in the direction of timely and proactive investigations and to ensure proper enforcement of violations.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6:**

***Significantly increase funding for the Labour Relations Board and the Employment Standards Branch for increased staffing to ensure these institutions can fulfill their mandate.***

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Effective enforcement of the Employment Standards Act (ESA) could result in millions of dollars of additional revenue for the government, therefore increasing funding to the ESB could be cost-neutral. When workers' wages are recovered through ESA enforcement this becomes taxable income. Further, when the ESB fails to collect owed wages found to be owed to complaints, it is also failing to collect penalties that the government could be using as revenue.

Penalties for violations of the ESA could be significantly increased. Currently, penalties for violations of the ESA are very low – only \$500 for the first contravention and this penalty remains the same even if more than one employee is affected. In other provinces, the penalty is multiplied by the number of employees affected by the contravention. Furthermore, repeat offenders only receive an increased fine if they violate the same provision of the act, if a different provision is violated the penalty remains only \$500.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7:**

***Review the potential of employment standards enforcement as a revenue stream.***

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Certification should be granted when a union demonstrates membership support of 50 percent+1 at the worksite. Secret ballot votes should only be held in cases in which a union has submitted membership evidence for more than 40 percent of employees, but less than 50 percent+1.

Workers have a constitutionally protected right to join unions, and our labour laws should facilitate rather than hinder that process. As Section 3 Panel member Sandra Bannister, QC noted in the 2018 Labour Relations Code Review Panel Report, “[C]ard check certification remains the single most effective mechanism to avoid unlawful employer interference and to ensure employee choice.”

There are also significant barriers for marginalized workers to join a union. Workers who are precariously employed, low-wage, or who face language barriers should not be disadvantaged to joining a union. Reforming labour law is a step toward equity, both in terms of wages and working conditions, but also providing a voice to those workers who are most marginalized.

Two-stage certification processes, with a threshold of signed cards followed by majority vote, remain rife with employer interference. The 2019 Labour Code amendments are reactive rather than proactive: they punish employers who are caught engaging in unlawful conduct. However, they do not ameliorate the adversarial relationship between workers and employers, nor the damage done, the stress created, or the lasting impact when the dust settles. Employer and union campaigns continue to take place today, notwithstanding the Code amendments, and are frequently hotly contested and may poison workplaces.

The 2019 Labour Code amendments have not levelled the uneven playing field between workers and their bosses on the shop floor. Employers still engage in unfair labour practices during the certification process, which divert resources away from the parties and consume the already stretched resources of the Labour Relations Board.

Utilizing card check certification would result in cost savings because there would be no need for the LRB to administer votes which is a time-sensitive, priority process. It would free up LRB and Employment Standards Branch staff (they use ESB staff to assist with these processes given their urgency) to meet other needs which are currently delayed.

### **RECOMMENDATION 8:**

*Immediately implement card-check certification.*

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## **Sector-Specific Recommendations**

### **EDUCATION**

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS HIGHLIGHTED ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC EDUCATION IN B.C. AS A KEY FACTOR IN CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH,**

Accessibility to public education, including building capacity for digital connectivity, is an issue of equity, diversity and inclusion. Public education is not only important for the growth and development of our children, but it also enables many parents to participate in the labour market as their kids are cared for during the school day. While the pandemic has disproportionately disadvantaged equity-seeking groups, accessible public education is a way forward for providing opportunities to future generations that will help balance the scales, whether in early childhood education, kindergarten to grade 12, or post-secondary education.

### **K-12 EDUCATION**

**YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SUFFERED GREATLY DURING THE PANDEMIC, ESPECIALLY FOR MARGINALIZED YOUTH WHO DISPROPORTIONATELY FELT PANDEMIC IMPACTS.**

A K-12 funding framework is required beyond provisions for increased costs in K-12 education due to the pandemic alone. With the issues of mental health that have been highlighted by the pandemic, it's crucial that government strengthen K-12 programs that support the mental health of B.C.'s youth – especially students with special and complex needs, gender diverse students, Black, Indigenous and racialized students, and students from low-income families.

The legacy of BC Liberal budget cuts in K-12 that impacted arts and mental health programming (i.e., arts and music programs and resource teachers such as school psychologists and special needs educators) exacerbated the mental health impacts that students experienced during the pandemic, underscoring again why those programs and supports were critical to our youth in the first place. Districts that have not yet made cuts to those programs are at risk of doing so now if stable funding for the arts and mental health is not provided across the board. It is unacceptable that any student in B.C. should not have access to music or arts programs at school, or not be able to access mental health support at school.

### **RECOMMENDATION 9:**

*Increase funding levels for arts and mental health programs so that every school district in B.C. can offer arts and music programs.*

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Education Assistants (EAs) and Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) have been essential to providing instructional support, working with children with diverse and complex needs. EAs and AEAs have always been essential to improving the educational experience for all children.<sup>vi</sup> Considering the differential impacts of the pandemic that disproportionately affected Indigenous communities and the government's

commitment to supporting reconciliation, AEAs in particular have a more important role than ever. With more online learning, multi-modal learning, and other adaptations to our education system, instructional support is more important than ever; <sup>viii</sup> we know that with limited in-person time, the emotional connections between teachers and students that are essential to student learning are difficult to make and maintain online. <sup>xi</sup> By providing support in and outside of class time with teachers, EAs and AEAs can help students continue to make these essential emotional connections to their education system to improve their learning outcomes.

The pandemic also placed more stress on families of children with complex and special needs. Currently, basic educational obligations are being met for youth with complex needs, however much more can be done to create a more equitable system for children with complex needs. EAs are a key resource for ensuring that every student has a chance at quality education during these difficult times. While we don't know what the future of education will look like in the middle and long term, it is clear that all learning spaces, both physical and virtual, need more Education Assistant support.

The pandemic and our move to online and multi-modal learning has exposed gaps in our education system, and more EAs and AEAs are needed to address this shortage.

### **RECOMMENDATION 10:**

***Fund more training spaces and bursaries for Education Assistants and Aboriginal Education Assistants to ensure B.C. has enough trained staff for student support and success through the coming semesters.***

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CUPE BC continues to have serious concerns about staffing levels and working conditions for EAs and AEAs. Insufficient hours remain one of the most prominent concerns our leaders hear from our Aboriginal/Education Assistants. With shifts that generally range from just 4 to 6 hours per day, large numbers of EAs and AEAs are not earning living wages, and either struggle to make ends meet, or are forced to stitch full-time hours together by working multiple jobs.

Many school districts face significant difficulties filling already existing EA and AEA positions. Support staff continue to report that insufficient hours of employment, which create personal hardship for our members, has been the major contributor to the recruitment and retention problems that many districts place. Improvements in hours and wages would go a long way toward achieving recruitment and retention to meet the demands in the K-12 system.

Part of the solution to the recruitment and retention problem for EAs and AEAs may lie in the expansion of public child care in school spaces. Access to child care so parents can return to work has become more important than ever during B.C.'s phases of reopening, especially for ensuring that women have equal opportunity to return to work. With early childhood education training, EAs and AEAs could be providing before- and after-school care services in-house using the "seamless day" model in which children get to start and end their day in the same education facility with familiar staff. This well-regarded and high quality child care model would provide EAs and AEAs the full-time hours needed for sustainable fair wage employment, helping with ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. This solution would also provide much needed child care spaces and relieve pressure on parents, both of which contribute to our economic recovery in a way that is sensitive to issues of gender equity.

### **RECOMMENDATION 11:**

***Fund early childhood education training for Education Assistants and Aboriginal Education Assistants and fully integrate early learning and care into the K-12 education system.***

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Over the last two decades, CUPE custodial workers across the province have raised concerns over the limited dayshifts and daytime hours, which is threatening their ability to perform the work that they know is vital to maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment for students. This is an equity issue. COVID-19 highlighted how socio-economic inequities and race intersect with health outcomes. Racialized people are disproportionately represented in fields of essential work such as custodial work.

The increase to daytime hours this past year has been hugely beneficial to custodial workers' ability to perform their jobs well and safely; however, it will not be enough going forward with the demands for cleaning of high-touch areas in school during the pandemic. Understaffing and overwork in this area is a health and safety issue for all staff and students, especially now that sanitization is more important than ever to fight the pandemic. We also equally need to focus on the cleaning and sanitization levels that create genuinely healthy and clean schools – BCCDC acknowledged that there was no flu season last year.

The work of daytime custodians stops the spread of disease in schools and in communities, protecting our most vulnerable citizens, reducing the amount of time staff and students miss due to illness, and protecting the overall health of communities. Clean and safe schools will create confidence in bringing students who have been receiving education outside of the bricks and mortar schools during the pandemic as well as confidence in attracting families who take part in the international education program. Custodial workers must be provided the fair wages, adequate hours, and necessary protections to safely carry out their essential work.

### **RECOMMENDATION 12:**

***Ensure that sufficient funding be allocated to the K-12 budget to provide for the full reinstatement of daytime custodial staff, to immediately restore adequate staffing levels going forward, and to fund ongoing provision of health protections such as PPE for K-12 custodial workers.***

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This course of action would likely require a progressive reduction but should be undertaken with the aim of redirecting public funds to the public system. CUPE BC believes that a strong public education system is the best way to ensure that education is inclusive, equitable, and accessible. Public education is the backbone of a democratic society.

### **RECOMMENDATION 13:**

***Eliminate public funding to elite private schools.***

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Substantial work has been done in B.C. to address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action which pertain to education at the provincial level (62-64); for example the Equity in Action project. It is critical that work on Calls to Action 62-64 continues, evolves, and grows.

B.C.'s 2019 adoption of UNDRIP into provincial legislation is commendable. UNDRIP Article 14: Right to Education affirms the right of Indigenous people to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination, and that the State shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, to have access to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. There is farther to go on this article, especially as it pertains to Indigenous language education in public schools.

## RECOMMENDATION 14:

*That K-12 funding be provided in order to implement UNDRIP Article 14, namely expanding and adding Indigenous language learning opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.*

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## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

IN THE DEPTHS OF THE COVID-19 LOCK DOWN, WE QUICKLY LEARNED THAT BRITISH COLUMBIA'S ROBUST AND WELL-ORGANIZED PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM WAS ABLE TO RISE TO THE OCCASION AND, ON A PROVINCE-WIDE SCALE, PROVIDE ACCESS TO MUCH-NEEDED CHILD CARE SERVICES.

This experience from one of our province's most challenging periods provides solid evidence that our K-12 system can make a substantial contribution to filling B.C.'s tremendous need for child care spaces. The lessons learned during the pandemic provide a positive path forward to a better British Columbia for parents and kids.

The B.C. government has demonstrated progressive leadership in the issue of child care since 2017. With a record number of \$10 per day sites already in operation, and with the historic child care agreement between the province and federal government, our province is poised to build a robust, province-wide social program that will help families for generations to come. Among the B.C. government's stronger directions on child care is the decision to move responsibility from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to the Ministry of Education. This decision is poised to make best use of our existing public education system by rolling out a public model for child care that capitalizes on existing efficiencies of our world-class public education system to deliver high quality, affordable child care in communities across our vast province.

Expansion of child care in the public education system will be a foundational element of an equitable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only will this investment create countless opportunities for parents, mostly women, to re-enter and expand their participation in the labour force, but will itself contribute to job creation. Investments in new public child care spaces bring with them a contribution to our post-pandemic recovery through the creation of stable, good paying jobs in the child care sector. Further, this contributes particularly to the economic recovery of women who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID related economic downturn and disproportionality represented in the child care sector.

To support government's leadership in the creation of a true public system of affordable child care, several recommendations are presented below.

## RECOMMENDATION 15:

*Invest in infrastructure (physical spaces, retrofits, modular, etc.) that enable expansion of child care services in public schools and the future delivery of early years learning (zero to five-year-old child care options) integrated with the existing public education system.*

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The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Starting Strong V Report (OECD, 2017) confirms that the transition from early childhood education to public school is a big step for children. Further investments in high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and smooth transitions between the various stages of early education are key for children's long-term learning and development. For most children in B.C., school-based kindergarten is currently the only place where ECEC and education overlap.

As B.C. builds out a new universal system of child care, it will be important to ensure that child care services have proper accountability measures to keep workers and children safe, and that parents have confidence in those measures. Public child care delivered by school districts has such measures built in as part of an existing robust public system with accountability and oversight infrastructure. The reality of public child care in school districts means that parents have access to accountability through those at their child's school, through the district and the local school board, and through the B.C. government.

Finally, the Childcare BC equity-focused goal of improving access to child care by supporting British Columbians who need it most, including young parents, children with special needs, and Indigenous communities<sup>x</sup>. As B.C. creates a new universal child care system, a similar equity focus, along with concrete funding commitments and frameworks to evaluate success, should be stated upfront.

### **RECOMMENDATION 16:**

***Invest in an equity-focused integrated model of before- and after-school child care to improve access to affordable (no more than \$10 a day), high-quality child care, and to improve children's learning outcomes throughout their school years.***

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The common school day is typically 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; not what most workdays look like for parents. An integrated model of before- and after-school care provided in schools by school districts means parents have a reliable, accessible and high-quality child care solution in every corner of our province. Having this service provided in-house by district employees would mean that children get to begin and end their day at school with adults they know and participate in programming connected to their school day and learning. This model is a highly regarded model for child care that makes best use of existing public investments in our school system by capitalizing on integration of these two key education services.

An integrated model will deliver high-quality early care and learning while also solving a practical problem for parents. In addition to the provision of educational and curriculum-relevant programs for learners, integrated child care also delivers better wages and working conditions for those providing the care. On this point, school districts have a fantastic advantage and can make a substantial contribution to one of the greatest challenges in expanding child care, available labour force. The standing labour force of educational assistants and other qualified staff within our school districts is a substantial asset in the expansion of child care spaces as this workforce is highly skilled, able to provide the care and education required, and has been calling for increased access to full-time hours for some time. In fact, in-house delivery of integrated child care by school districts is a win-win-win solution that provides the child care families need, the additional hours K-12 workers have been seeking, and the fair wages, job security and positive working conditions lacking in much of the child care sector.

Lack of school age care is a critical problem facing almost every community in B.C.. Investing in publicly delivered before- and after-school care leverages the advantages of the existing public education system – governance and public oversight, robust administrative structures, available physical spaces appropriate for this age cohort, and an available highly qualified workforce. The public education system represents an opportunity to provide thousands of desperately needed school age child care spaces quickly and efficiently.

### **RECOMMENDATION 17:**

***Build a world class system of ECEC by fully implementing the \$10aday plan including fully funding school districts to operate child care in their districts.***

Moving responsibility for Early Childhood Education and Care to the Ministry of Education (MoE) by 2023 was an important and necessary step towards building the system of high-quality ECEC that British Columbians need. The Province should build on this good work by fully implementing the recommendations of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates and the Early Childhood Educators of B.C. as outlined in the \$10 a Day Plan by giving school districts a central role in the delivery of ECEC.

A major barrier to building an integrated ECEC system in B.C. is the current division between education and child care. As described in *Integrating Child Care and Early Education: A Central Theme in Early Care and Learning*, implementing an integrated approach to child care and education eliminates the 'split system' approach where child care is viewed as a social service and early education services as education. While moving responsibility for child care to the MoE is an important step towards a high-quality system of ECEC, without school districts at the core of ECEC delivery at the community level we will not achieve the integration between child care programs and the public education system that B.C. families and students need.

Workforce development and retention is also crucial if B.C. is to meet current and future demand for child care. Child care advocates have long identified poor compensation and burnout as significant impediments to the creation of the workforce necessary to deliver a universal system of child care on a provincial scale. This same observation can be found in the analysis of the Child Care Action Plans developed by local governments across B.C. with the assistance of the UBCM. B.C. cannot attract and retain the qualified workforce necessary to build a high-quality universal system of ECEC if work in this sector isn't made into respected, high-quality, family-sustaining careers. Public operation through School Districts addresses that issue directly by providing high quality career opportunities are well compensated and provide access to benefits and a pension. This is almost unheard of within the existing patchwork market-based system of child care delivered through private non-profit and for-profit organizations.

## POST SECONDARY

**CUPE BC REPRESENTS MORE THAN 15,000 POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION WORKERS AT B.C.'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.**

From providing direct instruction and participating in research to maintenance, ancillary and student services, academic support, recreation, events, libraries, and clerical roles, CUPE BC members work in every facet of our post-secondary institutions. CUPE members, along with faculty and students, are a key part of the campus community and recognized as partners in academic governance through education councils, senates, college boards and university boards of governors.

### RECOMMENDATION 18:

***Increase funding of post-secondary institutions to at least 75 percent of base budgets and increase research funding and capacity.***

16 years of cuts to post-secondary education by the BC Liberal government have left post-secondary institutions in challenging positions. Lower government funding coupled with caps on domestic tuition fee increases have led to a funding model that is highly dependent on international student tuition fees. This model, as shown through the COVID-19 pandemic, is highly precarious. Public post-secondary education is essential for the future of British Columbia and will be vital to a just economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increased funding to support research funding and capacity will help to attract world-class scholars and continue to ensure that British Columbia's post-secondary education is globally competitive. Public

funding for research will help to ensure that research is done for the public good, rather than being funded by and benefitting the private sector.

Furthermore, systemic change is necessary across post-secondary institutions with regard to Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation. The B.C. Campus/Ministry of Advanced Education “Pulling Together” series is an excellent resource. Sustained and reliable funding is necessary for Indigenous and ally educators to put this important work into action.

Chronic underfunding has put immense pressure on all parts of our post-secondary system, but the cuts have disproportionately been applied to campus services and facilities. As a result, staff workloads increased while pay did not keep up with inflation, and work became more precarious. For non-academic workers, as full-time regular staff retire, institutions are not hiring replacement full-time regular staff. Instead, post-secondary institutions are increasingly relying on part-time and casual staff that often have limited access to benefits. In some areas, institutions are simply contracting work out to low-wage, for-profit companies whose return on investment is enhanced by shorting our campus communities of the services they rely on.

Precarious work and the negative effects of contracting out in the post-secondary sector is most strongly felt by those who work in food, custodial, and facilities services as work is outsourced to large corporations such as Compass, Sodexo, Chartwells, Best Service Pro, and a whole host of firms providing trades and maintenance services. These corporations pay low wages and use pending contract bids as an excuse not to improve poor working conditions. This has ramifications for the state of maintenance and upkeep on B.C.’s post-secondary campuses and for the overall quality of employment provided by B.C.’s tax dollars.

This government has supported the repatriation of public sector work in healthcare, and we would like to see that support extend to post-secondary institutions, with the development of a framework to bring work back in-house. This is an important issue, because privatization weakens communities. Privatization is also an equity issue, as women and racialized people are primarily impacted by contracted out work at post-secondary campuses.

Post-secondary funding should include directed funding to be utilized for deferred maintenance. Safe and clean infrastructure is best and safest for all workers and students on our post-secondary campuses, and those working to provide these services on campuses deserve fair working conditions. All too often, the focus is on new builds rather than ensuring that current infrastructure is in good condition. Ignoring deferred maintenance creates a more expensive problem down the line.

### **RECOMMENDATION 19:**

***Increase funding for campus services, support bringing back in-house campus services, and provide additional resources to address deferred maintenance.***

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Adequate participation in the decision-making boards at colleges and universities is essential for our members who are part of the campus community and underrepresented on boards. Often, the voices of staff are not heard around decision-making tables, even though staff intimately understand post-secondary institutions and the needs of students and faculty. Adding additional seats to boards will help to protect democratic decision-making at colleges and universities and help to counterbalance the influence of appointed members who are not a part of the campus community.

## RECOMMENDATION 20:

*Amend the College and Institute Act, University Act, and other institution-specific legislation to add a second elected support staff seat to college boards and add a second employee seat dedicated to institutional support staff to university boards of governors.*

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The current B.C. government has made enormous advancements in post-secondary education affordability, providing new means for those from low- and middle-income families to get the education they need to build a better life. But the government must go further.

As we move out of the COVID-19 pandemic, post-secondary education will be an essential piece of the province's economic recovery. The upfront barrier of tuition fees and the burden of student debt prevent some of the province's most marginalized from accessing post-secondary education. A tuition fee freeze and reduction will support students, but this must be done in conjunction with increased government funding to support a loss in revenue from user fees.

## RECOMMENDATION 21:

*Immediately freeze and progressively reduce tuition fees, replacing lost user fee revenue with increased government funding.*

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Lower tuition fees and lower student debt will allow graduates to participate in British Columbia's economy more significantly, and feed money back into government coffers through taxation revenue.

## LIBRARIES

**LIBRARIES PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN OUR SOCIETY BY PROVIDING FREE ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND RELATED SERVICES TO EVERYONE.**

They are one of the few remaining public institutions that are truly equitable in providing accessible services for all community members. Libraries are not only vital educational centres for communities across the province, but they also act as a community hub, employment centre, and a point of access for many health, wellness, and economic services and benefits. Libraries provide a safe, welcoming space at no cost for families, newcomers, those with special and unique needs, people looking for work, those without homes or amenities – for everyone in our communities. CUPE members are proud to provide these vital services in their communities across the province.

The pandemic has further shown us that libraries are more important than ever, and are playing a fundamental role in B.C.'s recovery. With record unemployment rates, British Columbians must be able to continue to access free internet and technology services so they can apply for government services and programs, and conduct job searches so they can re-enter the labour market. Libraries provide the main access point to the internet and technology for many who cannot afford high-speed internet or do not have a computer at home, offering a reliable internet connection to those who need one. Libraries must continue to bridge the digital divide throughout our recovery phase in communities large and small across the province.

Libraries have an important social and equity role in our communities and are places of cultural and socio-economic diversity. During the July 2021 heatwave, libraries functioned as potentially life-saving cooling centres. In the winter, unsheltered individuals warm up in a library. Children who lack after-school care may spend time waiting for their caregivers in their local libraries. Many people who use drugs

may do so in library public bathroom facilities. These examples not only showcase our communities' dependence upon libraries as community hubs, but at the same time show the regular difficult situations that library workers face that are well outside of their job descriptions. Library workers are regularly first responders to overdose and mental health crises. Library workers need higher staffing levels and additional training to respond to these situations safely.

As the economy and our communities reopen and recover, libraries are still not being prioritized. Many of our libraries, despite reopening, are not operating at full pre-pandemic programming and staffing levels, leaving thousands of British Columbians without access to the important services that they provide. When libraries are not fully open or are otherwise underfunded or under-resourced, our other social services are impacted. Social service and community agencies rely on libraries and their services to support communities, and without robust library services in place, these agencies become overburdened, and in some cases completely overwhelmed. To revitalize and reconnect our communities, we need our libraries to return to and sustain full operations.

In our submission to this Committee in past years, we urged the government to increase funding to \$20 million per year. While some improvements have been made over the last two budgets, we repeat the recommendation this year. Libraries continue to face fiscal challenges in that they cannot raise funds themselves, and they have experienced a significant reduction in revenue from reduced or eliminated late fees throughout the pandemic. For library services and programming as well as the necessary staffing levels to be fully restored and maintained, adequate public funding is required.

### **RECOMMENDATION 22:**

*Increase funding for public libraries in B.C. to \$22 million per year and ensure immediate adequate funding to deliver and sustain full services and programming.*

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All rural libraries across B.C. are important hubs for community service and internet access. Small rural libraries, funded by local municipalities themselves hurt by an economic slowdown in such sectors as tourism and natural resources, have fewer resources to fund needed library services. Even worse, many rural and Indigenous communities in B.C. still have little or no access to library services. Direct provincial funding is needed to support all libraries, but especially those in B.C.'s small and remote communities and those serving nearby reserve communities. The B.C. government should invest in the staffing, training, and infrastructure necessary to ensure that all of these communities have access to borrowing print materials, the internet, and other digital and technological resources provided by libraries.

### **RECOMMENDATION 23:**

*Create a program directing provincial funding to support small, rural, and remote libraries and library systems as well as increasing funding specifically for Indigenous communities to access free library and internet services.*

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## **MUNICIPAL WORKERS**

**CUPE BC REPRESENTS MORE THAN 30,000 MUNICIPAL WORKERS WHO PROVIDE THE SERVICES AND MAINTAIN THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT IS VITAL TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF BRITISH COLUMBIANS AND OUR COMMUNITIES.**

Now, more than ever, B.C.'s municipalities are facing unprecedented pressures and yet lack the necessary funds to meet growing needs. For decades, senior levels of government have downloaded more responsibilities to local governments, often without the necessary funds to pay for them.

Municipalities are unable to generate revenue fairly and equitably, relying primarily on property taxes and user fees to cover their expenses. These revenues were not designed and are not adequate to support the service delivery and infrastructure needs of our cities and towns.

### **RECOMMENDATION 24:**

*Investigate progressive models for fair taxation and make new progressive models of revenue generation available to municipalities.*

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Not only are B.C. municipalities struggling to maintain the infrastructures and services necessary to provide their residents with a decent quality of life, but municipalities are feeling the biggest brunt of climate change in significant and dire ways. Not only are there are significant deficits within B.C.'s municipal infrastructure that need to be addressed, but municipalities are also experiencing worsening consequences of climate change. Whether it be from storm damage, severe heatwaves, drought, wildfires, or flooding, our municipalities are facing unprecedented infrastructure damage, declining service delivery, diminished public health and safety, and disruptions to the local economy because of climate change. Not only does much of our current infrastructure fail to meet current demands, but they also are not designed to withstand these climate change impacts. Additional infrastructure funding is needed not only to address current deficits but to integrate climate resiliency asset management practices to address climate change hazards with the expedience and urgency necessary to protect our communities and their residents.

### **RECOMMENDATION 25:**

*Increase funding to address infrastructure deficits and allow municipalities to integrate climate resiliency within their infrastructure builds, upgrades, and replacements.*

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## **COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES**

**COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES WORKERS ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE CARE OF PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, THEY SUPPORT FAMILIES AND YOUTH IN NEED, THEY PROVIDE QUALITY CHILD CARE, THEY ASSIST PEOPLE WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES, AND THEY SUPPORT VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE.**

They are necessary to the care of vulnerable populations. Through the pandemic, they were essential services offering critical assistance and support for the health and well-being of thousands of British Columbians.

The low-wage redress and the elimination of contract flipping have been a huge step forward in closing the wage gap that has persisted between these workers and others doing similar work but who work directly in the healthcare sector. The province's efforts have helped in protecting those jobs and wages, thereby increasing worker retention, worker safety, and quality of care.

The gap between social services workers and other workers doing similar work in the healthcare sector can also be seen by the fact that social service workers often receive fewer and lesser job protections. One of these instances is that social service workers have their pay reduced by 20 per cent on sick days. This and other such provisions constitute an unfair and unequitable system in which the same work is devalued based on the venue in which that work is conducted. This unfairness should be corrected.



## **RECOMMENDATION 26:**

*The government should continue with its effort to address low wages for those doing care work and its effort to pursue wage parity amongst those doing this work across sectors.*

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With the rate of pay offered for sick days for our social services sector, it's possible that members have to choose between losing 20 per cent of their paycheque and going to work sick. Recognizing that social services are essential support to our most vulnerable populations in B.C., it is time we make sick leave an option rather than a punishment. This kind of measure will ensure a healthy and safe workplace, which means healthy and safe families in B.C.. Further, in light of the heightened requirement to ensure that workers are not going to work sick during the coronavirus pandemic, measures such as this which serve as a disincentive to stay home while sick, are especially unhelpful and even dangerous. The B.C. government must be a leader in providing fair sick pay in order to better encourage those in the private sector to do the same.

## **RECOMMENDATION 27:**

*Provide adequate funding for sick days paid at 100 per cent of regular wages.*

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Quality programs for the people served by community social service workers must be provided in order for people to live their lives to their maximum potential. The current funding model does not account for expenditures such as overtime, mileage, administrative time, and other related expenses which have been negotiated in the collective agreements. Employers are often restricted from reallocating funding as needed, particularly during unforeseen circumstance. Underfunding of community social service programs results in increased violence in the workplace, increased time off due to injury, including stress related injuries, negative impact on wellness and longevity in the field, and affects recruitment and retention in the sector.

## **RECOMMENDATION 28:**

*Adequately fund the community social service programs in the province.*

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Every British Columbian should have the supports needed to live full and meaningful lives with dignity, so that we all truly belong in inclusive and accessible communities and every person in our province has worth, is valued and has the right to be fully included in our communities.

Many adults with developmental disabilities need disability supports, including residential life skills, employment and community inclusion supports that empower them to live safe, healthy and productive lives and to participate as full citizens. However, too many British Columbians are still being denied this fundamental right. Further many young people fall into a 'black hole' without access to services after they leave school because provincial funding for Community Living BC has fallen behind the need for adult supports.

## **RECOMMENDATION 29:**

*Immediately increase the Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) annual funding to keep pace with the agency's projected caseload growth and commission a full review of CLBC that examines governance, mandate, support needs, transparency and operations.*

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# COMMUNITY HEALTH

## CUPE BC IS AMONG THE UNIONS REPRESENTING WORKERS IN COMMUNITY HEALTH ACROSS THE PROVINCE.

Diverse CUPE members can be found in multiple health authorities and non-governmental organizations like the PHS Community Services Society where they work under both the Health Sciences Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) collective agreement, and under the Community Bargaining Association (CBA) contract. Among our members are a large variety of professions including clerical support clerks, environmental health officers, mental health workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and many more. In the community health sector, the majority of workers identify as women.

Understaffing continues to be a significant issue for community health. A workload survey of members in community health in the spring of 2021 illuminated this issue, with 60 per cent of respondents indicating that in the last year there have been positions vacated and not filled. Citing a shortage of staff and reluctance to approve overtime, 73 per cent of members surveyed reported regularly working unpaid time (once or more per week on average), including skipping breaks, staying late and beginning their shifts early. With the added complexity of redeployment due to the pandemic, staff are on the verge of burning out. Workers feel like they are doing more with less when the needs of clients are becoming more complex.

Workload issues are not just about those experiencing them directly, the quality of public services is suffering as a result of employee shortages. Less than half of respondents to the survey referenced above reporting being satisfied with the level of service the conditions of employment allow them to provide. Eighty per cent said that workload impacts quality of service provided to the public. In some cases, survey respondents noted large wait times leading to some members of the public being deemed non-essential as workers triage their workload. When workers in this sector are regularly confronting situations where there is simply not enough time to do it all, worker and public health and safety is put at risk.

There is now a unique opportunity to retrain British Columbians who are looking for new careers after the COVID-19 pandemic; this is an exceptional time for the province to support recruitment efforts to ensure that there is an adequate staffing level, improving wait times for the public and supporting workers who feel overwhelmed.

### RECOMMENDATION 30:

***Provide specific funding to increase staffing levels and to support the recruitment and retention of health science professionals, including administrative staff, with a focus on full-time permanent work.***

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They only lasting solution to critical shortages and the evolution of complexity in the sector is an investment of funding grow the workforce and better address the increasingly diverse and multifaceted needs of clients.

Dealing with people in distress takes a significant toll on the mental health of frontline staff, with 73 per cent of those surveyed in community health indicating that they have suffered mental health impacts in the last year due to workload alone. What makes the situation more acute is the trauma that workers confront as a common element of their jobs. Whether an emergency call taker or dispatcher on the phone with someone actively experiencing domestic violence, a paramedic aiding a child who has been severely injured in a motor vehicle accident, or a mental health worker providing support to someone with suicidal ideation, these jobs take a tremendous mental toll on those who undertake such tasks every day. Without new and additional ongoing supports, including enhancing mental health supports, this workforce at risk of serious and ongoing mental health injuries.

We urge the provincial government to fund comprehensive supports for frontline workers who support others in distress; this should be in addition to employer-provided programs that are not meeting the needs of workers and were not designed to provide ongoing supports to workers confronting trauma daily. Mental health supports should be flexible, with both in-person and virtual options available, must take cultural factors and appropriateness into consideration (e.g., with a diversity of traditional providers and supports eligible for funding), and should be developed in coordination with workers and the unions that represent them.

### **RECOMMENDATION 31:**

*Expand and strengthen ongoing mental health supports for frontline workers in community health and emergency services.*

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With B.C.'s ongoing opioid crisis, we need more solutions that are dedicated to addressing addiction as a mental health issue. There are a multitude of groups who experience barriers such as racism and discrimination in accessing traditional healthcare. Among the groups affected by this barrier are women, especially Black, Indigenous and racialized women, trans and non-binary populations, and people with disabilities. Conventional health service facilities and providers often fail to defend and support these marginalized groups against discrimination, and even worse, institutions sometimes perpetuate stigma, rejection and violence through policies, programs and attitudes.

It is incumbent on our province to ensure that healthcare facilities and services do not discriminate. For example, with gender-based anti-stigma policies and programs, stand-alone facilities that are dedicated to trans women and non-binary persons can increase the chances of successful addiction treatment by ensuring the safety of their clients. Facilities that consider cultural needs and spiritual practices can have a strong impact on Indigenous and racialized clients. And facilities that are physically accessible include those who live with disabilities. Such facilities are bound to improve healthcare outcomes for these populations and take pressure off other facilities and programs that are less equipped to deal with the unique needs of these populations and are struggling with workload and patient volumes.

### **RECOMMENDATION 32:**

*Create more stand-alone addiction treatment facilities for women, including Black, Indigenous and racialized women, trans women, non-binary persons, and people with disabilities.*

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## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**OVER THE PAST NUMBER OF YEARS THE CUPE LOCAL 873 PARAMEDICS AND DISPATCHERS HAVE RAISED CONCERNS REGARDING RECRUITMENT OF NEW PARAMEDICS AND DISPATCHERS INTO THE B.C. EMERGENCY HEALTH SERVICES (BCEHS) TO MEET THE PUBLIC'S NEEDS DUE TO RISING CALL VOLUMES.**

More recently the opioid crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted ongoing recruitment and retention problems. During the recent unprecedented heat wave, the lack of paramedics and emergency medical dispatchers, the ability of BCEHS to answer and respond to emergency 911 calls was negatively impacted. The mounting call volume coupled with a shortage of staff have led to a record number of WSBC claims and health issues for members of CUPE Local 873.

Investment in the recruitment of new paramedics and emergency medical dispatchers and a focus on the retention of existing workers will ease the burden faced by paramedics and dispatchers and better serve British Columbians who require the services of the BCEHS, and support CUPE emergency services

workers. It will improve the level of service delivery to the public and ensure that staff feel supported to stay in their jobs long-term.

### **RECOMMENDATION 33:**

*The Ministry of Health increase support to BC Emergency Health Services to address critical ongoing staff shortages and call response times.*

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## **TRANSPORTATION**

**RURAL ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ISSUE, ONE WHICH HAS ONLY BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY THE PANDEMIC WHEN THE NORTHERN B.C. TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM WAS REDUCED.**

Many people in rural communities rely on bus services to access health services, employment, education, and even visit family. BC Bus North provides this intercity service between Prince Rupert, Prince George, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Valemount and many communities in between. However, there are many communities still lacking this service, and the infrequent bus schedules need to be multiplied. We know that profit-driven private companies are simply not willing to provide the bus services that our rural communities need. The provision of this service by provincial government is about making sure that people across British Columbia have safe and reliable access to services. This is an opportunity for B.C. to step up and close the gap between our rural and urban communities in B.C.

BC Bus North is also a key recommendation of the Highway of Tears Symposium Report; specifically as per Victim Prevention Recommendation 1: the implementation of an affordable shuttle bus transportation system along the entirety of Highway 16. We welcome and support the extension of funding; the next step is to permanently fund and expand this life-saving service, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions for BC Bus North workers. An important part of this recommendation is also that Highway 16 bus service must stop and pick up every woman and girl encountered walking or hitchhiking between those First Nation communities, towns, and cities on the Highway of Tears<sup>xi</sup>.

### **RECOMMENDATION 34:**

*Permanently fund BC Bus North and make the service more robust, including increasing service frequency on all four BC Bus North routes, and requiring BC Bus North to focus on the pick-up of every woman and girl walking or hitchhiking the Highway of Tears.*

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With reduced revenue generation during the COVID-19 pandemic, public transportation needs additional financial support from the province to ensure that high-quality, accessible public transportation is available to British Columbians across the province.

Investments in public transportation help build stronger communities, both now and in the long-term. Transportation should be publicly owned and operated, and respond to the needs of the communities they serve. The government's announcement of free public transportation to children under the age of 12 was a significant and welcome commitment, and is one step toward creating a more robust, accessible transportation system. A province connected by a robust transportation system both within and between communities will serve us in the long-term and expand the employment options for workers.

The intrusion of the private sector into transportation, including through private-public partnerships, is a detriment to the transportation sector. Private corporations prioritize profit-making, while we know that the government prioritizes British Columbians, including the needs of those in rural and Northern communities. Adequate public funding for transit operations, maintenance, and expansion will prevent communities from turning to the private sector for financial support.

### **RECOMMENDATION 35:**

*Increase investments in public transportation to expand and strengthen services.*

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## **CONCLUSION**

### **BRITISH COLUMBIA'S 2022 BUDGET NEEDS TO BE PRAGMATIC AS THE PROVINCE AND ITS CITIZENS LOOK TOWARD RECOVERY DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

CUPE BC's recommendations are all based on the fact that maintaining—and increasing—investment in public services is a much more effective tool to spurring economic recovery than so-called “austerity budgets” as some right-wing, neoliberal politicians espouse.

A truly successful and forward-thinking approach will use a strategy that is mindful of the differential intersectional impacts of the pandemic. Gender minorities, racialized people, Indigenous people, people with disabilities and people belonging to the LGBTQ2+ community and young people have disproportionately seen losses to jobs, income and general well-being. Now that the gaps in the foundation have been exposed, the 2022 B.C. budget can aim to lift up those belonging to equity-seeking groups to build a stronger B.C. for everyone. CUPE BC is recommending increased spending in public sectors and programs as part of a strategy for economic recovery that will move us toward a more equitable society.

Let's build back better.

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