

October 15, 2010

Open Letter to Minister Rich Coleman

Dear Minister Coleman,

We write on behalf of the nearly 7000 BC charities affected by gaming grants. These groups include the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Deaf Children's Society, Surrey Hospice Society, North Shore Rescue Team, Horsefly Volunteer Fire Department, Pacific Post Partum Support Society, Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre, Charlie Lake PAC, Campbell River Minor Hockey, Cerebral Palsy Sport Association, and thousands more worthwhile community causes across BC.

Our members are at work, tens of thousands of them, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, helping the poor, the weak and vulnerable, the elderly, disabled, the bullied child, sports teams, the arts, refugees and immigrants, and our environment. They man crisis lines, deliver Meals on Wheels, and search for the lost in our mountains and forests. We could not ever afford to buy what our charities and non-profits give us for free. We cannot live without them, and they never stop giving of themselves, no matter how hard it gets.

On Friday, October 15, you were asked to comment on our request to Vancouver City Council to postpone hearing any application to expand the gambling licenses relating to the planned Edgewater Casino redevelopment, pending the provincial government agreeing to honour its agreement to allocate 33.3% of net gaming revenues to BC charities.

You said that there was no agreement, only a letter of understanding, and that you have other bills to pay.

Minister Coleman, you are mistaken.

The Memorandum of Agreement with the BC Association for Charitable Gaming, which the Province of British entered into on June 17, 1999, can be found on the provincial government legislature's website at: http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs/336215/game_append4.htm. On that day the government formally crystallized a binding revenue sharing formula with both the charitable sector (for whose benefit gambling was legalized in Canada,) and the Union of BC Municipalities.

The Meekison Report of 2000 found both agreements to be foundational to the architecture of gaming in the province, and binding on the province. No subsequent legislation, regulation, enactment, or new agreement extinguishes this agreement, and the sister agreement with the Union of BC Municipalities (allocating 10% of net revenue to local host cities) stands, and is complied with by your government to this day.

BC charities have actively supported and enabled the expansion of BC gambling--mistakenly believing that this would bring them a share of the proceeds. Their participation and support in municipal expansion hearings has been decisive in councilors agreeing to allow more and more slot machines and casinos in their communities across the province.

Expansion of gambling in BC since 2001 has brought hundreds of millions in new money annually to the BC treasury, but **not a dime** of expansion proceeds has gone to the charities that made it all possible, and for whose benefit municipal councils agreed to it in the first place.

In fact, while net earnings from gambling expansion have risen 292% from 1995, your ministry has starved charities. In 2010, your ministry's allocation to BC charities was \$18.5 million LESS than the amount paid in 1995.

You say the recession drives your policy. Many BC charities are on the front line of the recession--helping the weak and vulnerable, dealing with family violence, suicidal youth, and addictions of many kinds, including, in a cruel twist, gambling.

Yet because your government failed to fulfill its contractual obligations--or even grant the courtesy of a meeting to discuss this matter, they are, almost every one, desperately short of money.

On average, for the last ten years, your government has short-changed charities out of more than a \$100 million of gambling entitlements each and every year. In 2009/10, your ministry underpaid charities by \$247 million.

Since your party took office, you have unlawfully taken almost \$1.3 billion from charities.

Your comments to media demonstrate exactly why it is vitally important to stop the expansion of Edgewater until this situation is clarified. BC charities are a 33.3% silent partner in this venture. You cannot wish us away.

We repeat our request of Vancouver City Council that it does not proceed on the Edgewater Casino until the province adheres to or renegotiates its binding contractual obligations.

Yours truly,

Susan Marsden,
President
BC Association for Charitable Gaming

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If this letter upsets you, please help protect our charities and non-profits by doing ALL of these:

1. Go to our website at www.bcacg.com and SIGN OUR TWO PETITIONS--especially the one for Vancouver Residents.
2. Call or write Vancouver City Council and tell them that you expect them to stand up and protect charities and non-profits.
3. Spread the word to anyone you know who volunteers, donates, or helps in our charitable and non-profit sector. You can find our Open Letter to Minister Coleman on the BC Association for Charitable Gambling website. Please send it on to others!
4. Come to our site and email us if you would like to be on our news update list. And contact us if you can volunteer your time and energy--we need you!