



Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

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February 14, 2018

The Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Children and Family Development
PO Box 9507, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Via email: MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca (original to follow by mail)

Re: Children and Family Development Support Service in Fort Nelson

Dear Minister Conroy,

I am writing on behalf of the Regional Council of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality, to bring your attention to a matter that is of great concern to residents of the Northern Rockies, a persistent shortage of social workers in our community.

The Northern Rockies encompasses about 10% of British Columbia's landmass and is situated in the northeast corner of the province. Fort Nelson is the largest community and is the service centre for the region. Unfortunately, we are experiencing an unprecedented erosion of services, including those provided by your ministry. Travel is difficult enough for residents, who are already expected to go elsewhere for services that are taken for granted in much of the province.

With the economic base of the region founded on the drastically reduced natural gas and nearly non-existent forestry sectors, our community has faced several years of challenging times. Unemployment is higher here than the rest of BC, and the need for social services are high. While many families have relocated, others are forced to separate, with one parent maintaining the family home in Fort Nelson, and the other seeking employment in other communities.

At such a time, there are numerous stresses on everyone and yet, your Ministry is offering fewer social services than ever. The local Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) office has been staffed at less than ideal levels for several years, and currently there is only one social worker on duty, out of a recommended five. Five-week waits for an appointment to see a social worker are not unheard of, which I'm sure you will acknowledge is not an acceptable situation when a person or family is in the midst of a crisis.

I am sure that hiring for remote locations such as ours is a challenge, but residents need to have confidence in what is essentially an emergency and essential service. We would like to know what steps the Ministry is taking to restore the MCFD staff to a full complement of at least five social workers. If current recruitment practices are not achieving results in attracting social workers to our community, your Ministry must take additional steps to ensure that adequate, local service is available. Offer greater incentives or advertise in new locations if you have to, but do something to ensure our community has the social worker staff to meet the basic needs of the Northern Rockies.

I am pleased to speak with you further in this regard, and am hopeful that we can reach a solution to this very pressing issue in the near future.

Yours truly,
Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Streeper". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Bill Streeper, Mayor

CC:
Kimberly Maher, Team Leader – Fort Nelson Ministry of Children and Family
Development (Kimberly.Maher@gov.bc.ca)