



March 11, 2013

Ref: 178735

Dear Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility:

On March 11, 2013, we celebrate the third anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This is a noteworthy occasion for Canada and British Columbia, and a good time to recognize how far we have come in supporting persons with disabilities in the province and acknowledge the work that still needs to be done. It is also a fitting occasion to recognize you as members of the Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility and the important work you do.

I would like, in particular, to thank you for the time and effort you put into providing me with your initial considerations. You have advised me that we need to work more closely with employers to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. As well, you have identified that supports for individuals and families are critical to ensuring that people have the supports they need to participate in the labour market. You have also identified that the public service can lead the way in embracing diversity in its hiring and personnel policies. Finally, you have outlined the critical role that public policy has in supporting employment for persons with disabilities.

I applaud you for this work. The provincial government fully supports your efforts, and welcomes your ongoing advice on ways of improving employment and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The ministry and its partners have already begun to undertake a number of initiatives consistent with these areas including:

1. Community Living BC's Community Employment Action Plan, a three-year plan to help increase the number of job opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities who wish to work in their communities.
2. New funding for the Giving in Action Society that will provide grants to families who have relatives with developmental disabilities or special needs.
3. Working with the Public Service Agency to improve "disability confidence" in the BC Public Service.
4. Policy reforms to increase work incentives, including higher earnings exemptions, annualized exemptions, asset-limit increases and greater exemptions to trust withdrawals.

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Ministry staff have also initiated partnerships with service providers and other disability organizations to collaborate and integrate efforts regarding employer engagement and to support persons with disabilities.

British Columbia is home to over 700,000 people living with a disability. As Minister, I have had the privilege of meeting many people with disabilities. I have been greatly impressed by the number of individuals with disabilities who have the motivation, knowledge and skills to work, and many of whom are simply in need of employment opportunities. It is my hope that the Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility will help provide the foundation for changes in attitude and specific initiatives that will afford these individuals the same chances as other British Columbians to pursue their career goals. I look forward to British Columbia being one of most inclusive and accessible provinces in the country.

Looking ahead to the coming year, on March 27, 2013, council members and Inclusion BC will have the opportunity to again avail themselves of the expertise of Susan Scott-Parker, Chief Executive Officer of the Business Disability Forum, and a leading international expert on employment for people with disabilities. I look forward to this discussion, and to the various options and proposals the council may come up with for the Province to consider and act on later this year.

Once again, thank you for your participation in the council and your commitment to the improvement of the lives of persons with disabilities in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Stilwell', written in a cursive style.

Moira Stilwell, M.D.
Minister