



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Civil Liberties Calls for Reinstating Prison Parenting Program

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) is calling on the provincial government to reinstate the mother-child program at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women. The lauded prison parenting program was cancelled in April of this year. British Columbia's Representative for Children and Youth has called for the reinstatement of the program and a legal action has been launched on behalf of five incarcerated women affected by the program's cancellation. Today the BCCLA released a position paper on child apprehensions in BC correctional facilities and called on the Solicitor General and Minister for Children and Family Development to bring the program back.

BCCLA Board Member Megan Vis-Dunbar: "The loss of the mother-child program in correctional facilities is an unjustified infringement on the rights of both the parents and the children. Apprehending newborns from female inmates causes serious harm to the child's psychological and emotional development and profound psychological stress to the parent. In addition, these harms disproportionately affect Aboriginal women and children because of the over-representation of Aboriginal women in Canadian prisons."

Without the parenting program at the facility, the Ministry of Children and Family Development apprehends children born to inmates who lack other family support and usually places them in temporary care while their mothers serve their sentences. If a woman's child has been placed in foster care during her incarceration, she often has to take legal action to regain custody. Under the *BC Child Family and Community Services Act*, a child under five years-old who has been in temporary care for over 12 months automatically becomes a ward of the state and may be put up for adoption.

Vis-Dunbar: "The loss of this program is devastating to vulnerable families. Single mothers who are incarcerated must have the option of being able to reside with their infant children. Anything less is inconsistent with our commitments under the *UN Declaration of Rights of the Child*, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*."

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