

WEST KOOTENAY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

420 MILL STREET, NELSON, B.C. V1L 4R9 (250) 352-3177 • FAX: (250) 352-7100

November 8, 1996

Ms. Penny Priddy
Minister Responsible for Children and Families
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Ms. Priddy

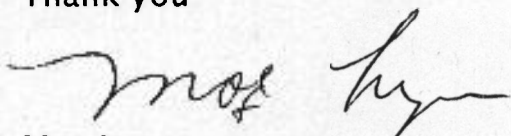
We would like to add our voice to the concerns expressed about what appears to be an arbitrary and heavy-handed decision to suspend four Ministry staff without pay.

We understand that the Ministry and your government have considerable and justifiable concern for the safety of children. However, suspension of these valuable employees without due process does not seem to be an appropriate response to these problems. Furthermore, removal of this personpower from the local office can only have a negative impact on their client base.

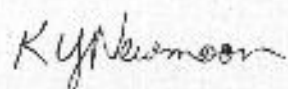
This action seems like some kind of face-saving manoeuvre that has been undertaken without sufficient thought.

We join with others in our community who are asking you to reconsider this decision.

Thank you



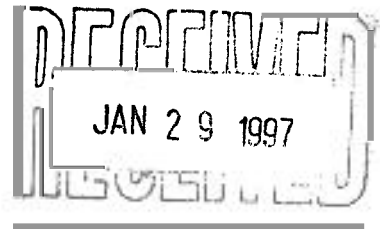
Moe Lyons



Karen Newmoon

Rhea Strong, Secretary
Louisa Robinson, Chair

Moe
x



January 22, 1997

Ref: 6007791

Moe Lyons and co-signers
West Kootenay Women's Association
420 Mill Street
Nelson, British Columbia
V1L 4R9

Dear Moe Lyons and co-signers:

I am writing in reply to your November 8, 1996 letter expressing your concern about the suspension without pay of four ministry staff. Please accept my apology for the delay in responding.

I regret that I am unable to comment on actions taken by the ministry against individual employees, as these matters are personal and confidential. Please be assured, however, that the decision to suspend staff without pay was not taken lightly and was only done after a thorough consideration of the information provided in a preliminary report done by the ministry's Audit and Review Division. This report raised questions about case practice and management which required an internal investigation of staff conduct in the case.

The internal investigation differs from the Coroner's inquest which is intended primarily to determine the cause of death. It has afforded the staff involved in the case with a fair process and an opportunity to be fully heard.

The ministry and each staff person carries an immense public trust to protect children. Whenever a case is subject to review, the ministry must determine whether everything was done to protect the child and to ensure the standards of service were met. If there are questions about case practice and management, consideration must be given as to whether an internal investigation of staff conduct is indicated.

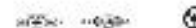
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**Ministry for
Children and Families**

Office of the Minister

Mailing Address:
Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

Location:
Parliament Buildings, Victoria



Suspension may be deemed advisable in some cases while an internal investigation is ongoing. Within government, it has been the normal practice for these suspensions to be without pay. The government's right to take this action has been upheld by arbitrators in numerous grievances over a number of years. The decision to suspend, however, is never an easy one to make, recognizing the potential impact on local and other ministry staff, communities and community partners, families and our public trust.

A key guiding principle of the new ministry is that staff will be treated in a fair and respectful manner. Social work staff must be valued and supported in their important work protecting children, including very difficult cases involving the death of a child. It is not the ministry's intention to routinely suspend staff without pay in these cases, unless there are very serious questions about case practice and management that require further investigation.

The support shown by the community of Nelson and surrounding communities for the four ministry staff has been very much appreciated, particularly the positive comments from those who have worked with them. These letters have all been forwarded to the ministry staff responsible for field operations.

Thank you for your letter and for providing me with your concerns about this very difficult situation.

Sincerely,


Penny Briddy
Minister