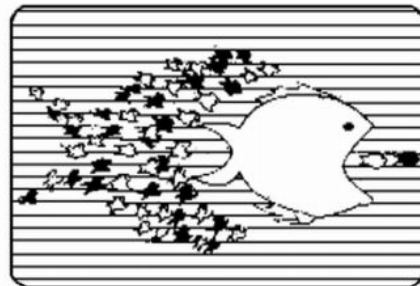


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## Ombudsman report reveals underlying problems in welfare ministry

**Tuesday, March 28, 2006**

(*Vancouver*) Fifteen anti-poverty groups across BC are welcoming the Ombudsman's report, released today, into complaints about unfairness at the BC Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance.

As a result of the Ombudsman's investigation, the Ministry has been making sweeping changes to policies and procedures, including to the application process and three week work search, reconsideration and appeal rights, and Ministry home visits.

"We're very pleased that the Ombudsman is taking our concerns seriously," said Nikki Dunlop of the Downtown Eastside Residents Association. "People who are forced to rely on income assistance in BC have faced increasing difficulty accessing benefits over the last few years."

"It's a shame that it took a complaint to the Ombudsman to get a response from the Ministry," commented Debra Apperley of the Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society. "Too often the Ministry has dismissed these complaints as problems of individual workers, but with these issues popping up all over the province we know they are systemic and must be addressed that way."

"We're pleased that the Ministry is going to now conduct emergency needs assessments within 24 hours, but we need to make sure that people in need receive the actual assistance right away too," cautioned Tish Lakes of the Okanagan Assistance and Resource Centre.

The Ombudsman noted that his office receives more complaints about the welfare ministry than any other public agency in the province. He ended his report by promising to continue to investigate as appropriate and to monitor the Ministry's practices to ensure that the commitments made as a result of his investigations have been met.

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