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The Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
Room 337 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

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Dear Minister Dix;

Re: Modernizing the Regulation of Health Professions

We are the professional association for social workers in British Columbia and we write on behalf of our members in support of the Ministry of Health's initiative to modernize the regulation of health care professions. This initiative will improve health care in our province and strengthen the protection of the public interest.

The BC Association of Social Workers (BCASW) has a long history of working to improve the quality of care provided to British Columbians through strengthening our profession and advocating for legislative change.

Currently, social work is partially regulated under the Social Workers Act of 1968. This Act led to the formation of the Board of Registration of Social Workers (BRSW) the following year. In 1995, the BC government mandated the separation of the BCASW and the BRSW leaving each to their unique functions of advocacy and professional regulation, respectively. Amendments to the Act in 2008 formed the BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) replacing the BRSW and updating the objects of the College. At no time has the Act fully protected the title "social worker" or mandated registration for all social workers with the College despite significant efforts by the Association and the College.

The Social Workers Act does not require all BC social workers to be registered with the College and therefore the Act does not fully serve the public interest. Social workers in some health authority positions and those in private practice (who choose to refer to themselves as social workers) are required to be registered with the College, leaving a significant majority of professional social workers to register voluntarily. The Act provides the framework for self-regulation of the profession with public input; however, our profession remains only marginally regulated. Notably, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has failed to make needed changes to the Social Workers Act.

The Cayton Report - An Inquiry into the performance of the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia and the Health Professions Act (2018) – presented an opportunity for our Association to present two briefs to the Ministry of Health. These briefs argued that the public interest is best protected by including social work, as a

fully regulated profession with protected title, within a revised Health Professions Act. On August 27, 2020, the Steering Committee on Modernization of Health Professional Regulation released their final report noting that social work should be considered for inclusion in the revised Health Professions Act.

Social workers provide a wide range of services to individuals, families, and communities using the framework of the social determinants of health. Using this lens, social workers are well positioned to improve accessibility to healthcare and to improve health outcomes regardless of their employment setting. Social workers provide assessment, intervention, and referral. Those with registered clinical social worker designation may provide mental health diagnoses. In complex situations, social workers are key members of treatment teams.

Our Association supports the Steering Committee's recommendations to group similar professions together in colleges large enough to achieve considerable efficiencies. Accordingly, we believe the public would be well served by a college comprised of social workers, psychologists, and counselling therapists. These professions can effectively communicate about ethical issues and practice standards, resulting in improved services to the public and enhanced capacity to superintend professional practice.

A college comprised of these professions has these additional benefits –

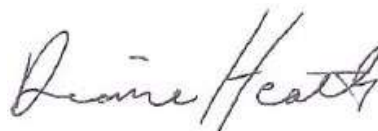
- Practitioners, not currently registered with a regulatory college and those who avoid oversight, will be brought under one college and their practice will be superintended for increased protection of the public interest.
- Government will be able to ensure that professionals who deliver social, behavioural, and health services have adequate levels of education and training.
- Professions, that often work together in social, behavioural, and health settings, will be able to work directly with one another to enhance the effectiveness of public mental health and addictions programs.
- The new college will be able to support the Ministry of Health's initiatives to increase the provision of mental health and addictions services as well as the recent growth in urgent and primary care centres.

Our Association would be pleased to work with the Ministry of Health to develop and implement a college designed to superintend the professional practice of social workers, psychologists, and counselling therapists. We look forward to your reply.

Regards,



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British Columbia Psychological Association
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Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists in British Columbia
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Health
Mark Armitage, Health Sector Workforce, Health
Mark MacKinnon, Professional Regulation, Health