

December 15, 1988

NOTICE TO THE MEDIA

The attached correspondence from the Honourable Elaine J. McCoy, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, to Ms. Margaret Leahey, Chairperson of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, was released today (December 15, 1988).

The letter and attachment set out the Government response to the recommendations submitted by the Council in June 1988.

- 30 -

For Further Information Contact:

Honourable Elaine J. McCoy
Minister Responsible for Women's Issues
427-2305

Please note: The Honourable Elaine J. McCoy will be available at McDougall Centre in Calgary on Thursday, December 15, 1988 from 3:30 until 5:00 p.m. The telephone number at McDougall Centre is 297-6464.



MINISTER OF
CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

MINISTER RESPONSIBLE
FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES

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December 15, 1988

Ms. Margaret Leahey
Chairperson
Alberta Advisory Council on
Women's Issues
Suite 1004, Highfield Place
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Edmonton, Alberta
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Dear Ms. Leahey:

It was a pleasure to review the second set of recommendations submitted to the Government of Alberta by the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. Once again the Advisory Council members have shown their solid commitment to the women of this Province by addressing issues of great concern to Alberta women. On behalf of my Cabinet colleagues, I would like to thank all the Advisory Council members for their hard work and dedication, and assure you that the Government intends to respond to the Advisory Council's recommendations as fully as is possible in this time of fiscal restraint.

During the next year, the Government will be taking concrete steps toward implementing many of the recommendations, but I want to highlight several initiatives which we feel are particularly important. Like you, the Government believes that the recognition of foreign credentials is a critical issue, not only to immigrants themselves but to the Province as a whole. Accreditation benefits immigrant women and men because it allows them to carry on in their chosen career, and it benefits the Alberta economy because it allows Alberta to take full advantage of the education, training and skills of newcomers.

However, the recognition of foreign credentials is an extremely complex problem with many stakeholders and no clear cut solution. The Government is therefore pleased to announce the creation of a fact finding Task Force on the Recognition of Foreign Credentials consisting of representatives from relevant Government departments. Through consultations with immigrant organizations, professional/occupational regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions, other Canadian jurisdictions, and other interested stakeholders, the Task Force will clearly define the problems

Ms. Margaret Leahey
December 15, 1988
Page Two

associated with recognition of foreign credentials and will recommend viable solutions to Government. The Task Force will begin its work immediately and present its final report in one year's time.

In the "Domestic Violence: Immigrant Women" section of the Advisory Council report, several important issues are raised. The Government agrees that these issues need to be addressed. Further, through the Interagency Committee on Family Violence and Immigrant Women, the Government has identified a range of issues which expand on these concerns. Membership in this Committee, which currently consists of representatives from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, Edmonton agencies, and province-wide organizations such as the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, will be expanded to ensure adequate representation from across Alberta and to ensure that the issues are addressed in an efficient and coordinated manner. The mandate of the Committee will continue to be to identify needs and gaps in services in the area of family violence and immigrant women and to develop appropriate responses in conjunction with other immigrant and social service organizations, women's shelters and government agencies.

With regard to your comments on Native education, I would like to thank you for your support of Alberta's innovative Native Education Project. We recognize, however, that along with your support, you have given us several recommendations, and we intend to act on them as far as is possible. For example, although the Government is unable to increase the \$4 million budget for Native Education Fund grants at this time, we will consider increasing the minimum grant to school boards by restructuring the development and contingency portion of the fund. We will also, as you recommend, distribute Native education textbooks throughout the Province to all appropriate institutions in order to promote awareness in the Native and non-Native populations.


We think that these are important initiatives, but we believe that the Native Women of Alberta have other pressing concerns which must also be addressed. Native women and Native women's organizations throughout the Province are actively searching for solutions to a variety of social, economic, and health issues. They want to resolve these issues and build a strong future for themselves and their people in the community, in the family, in the workplace, and in every other aspect of life in this Province.

Ms. Margaret Leahey
December 15, 1988
Page Three

As Native women work toward this goal, the Government of Alberta wants to lend its cooperation and support. To this end, the Government will undertake a dialogue with Native women through which they can share with us their priorities, concerns, opinions and solutions on the issues that concern them. The Government will use the information gathered during these discussions to make solid, informed decisions about programs and services which respond to the needs of Native women and their communities.

We feel that the initiatives outlined above are particularly significant but, as you will see by reading the attached document, the Government also intends to act on many of the other recommendations submitted by the Advisory Council. On behalf of my Cabinet colleagues, I would like to compliment you on a job well done and acknowledge the important role that the Advisory Council plays in our efforts to ensure that the women of Alberta have full and equal opportunity to participate in the life of the Province. The Government's response to the Advisory Council's recommendations indicates our strong commitment to the women of Alberta. My Cabinet colleagues and I look forward to a continued successful partnership with the Advisory Council.

Sincerely,



ELAINE J. McCOY, Q.C.
Minister Responsible for
Women's Issues
M.L.A. for Calgary West

cc: Premier Don Getty
Government Cabinet Members
Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, Members

Attachment

**GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA RESPONSE TO
ALBERTA ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES
JUNE, 1988 RECOMMENDATIONS**

RESPONSE REGARDING IMMIGRANT AND VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN

Recommendation #1: Information to Prospective Immigrants

The Government agrees that the provision of appropriate information to immigrants before they arrive in Canada helps them to make a smooth transition to life in their new country, and the Government is acting on this belief.

Materials from the Settlement Program of Alberta Career Development and Employment are already being sent to the Canadian co-ordinator of refugee orientation activities in Thailand, and preliminary discussions have been held with the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission on the feasibility of distributing Alberta orientation materials through six key Canadian embassies which handle the majority of refugees destined for Alberta. With respect to information on employment opportunities, up-to-date and comprehensive data will be provided periodically to Canada's visa officers in embassies around the world. In addition to the foregoing actions, the Government will discuss the issue of provision of information to prospective immigrants during the upcoming negotiations on the renewal of the Canada-Alberta Immigration Agreement.

Recommendation #2: Promoting Multiculturalism

The Government will continue to actively promote the benefits and rewards of multiculturalism. A wide range of services are currently available from the Cultural Heritage Division of Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, including consultation and community development services, and education programs such as workshops and presentations. The Division also sponsors conferences, produces brochures and newsletters, conducts research projects, and provides grants for activities that

promote multiculturalism in a variety of ways.

A major Government achievement in 1987 was the establishment of the Institute of Multicultural Resource Development. The Government anticipates that the Institute will have a significant impact on multiculturalism in the coming years. The Institute is affiliated with the Cultural Heritage Division and is the first of its kind in Canada. Its mandate is to provide training programs, resource materials and consultative services to governments, businesses, institutions and agencies in order to help them function effectively in today's multicultural society.

Recommendation #3: Universal Accessibility of ESL Programs

The Government recognizes that the acquisition of English is a prerequisite for the successful settlement of immigrants in Alberta, and is taking steps to ensure that all immigrants have access to appropriate language training.

It is the Government's firm belief that ESL funding should be part of national immigration policy as opposed to labour policy. Acting on this belief, the Government of Alberta has been vigorously pressing the federal government to develop a co-ordinated and comprehensive policy on language training and to provide funding commensurate with immigration levels and the other significant factors of need. The Government will forcefully reassert this position during the upcoming renegotiation of the Canada-Alberta Immigration Agreement.

In the meantime, and in the face of the federal funding cuts mentioned in the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues report, the Government of Alberta will continue its significant subsidization of full-time ESL training for adults so that available levels of full-time training will not fall drastically.

It should also be noted that Alberta Education offers funding of up to three years duration for students in the primary and secondary grades who require ESL training. ESL programs for children enable them to follow classroom instruction in English and speed their integration into the school and community environment.

Recommendation #4: Duration of ESL Programs

Rather than extending full-time training, the Government believes it would be preferable to provide initial immersion style language training at Government expense--which is largely being done at present--and to develop a wider spectrum of more universally available part-time programs to address needs over the long term. The present federal-provincial agreement in this sphere precludes this kind of follow-up programming. Hence the Government of Alberta will be pressing for a new approach to language training when renegotiating the Canada-Alberta Immigration Agreement.

Recommendation #5: Full-time ESL Programs/Workplace Experience

In many ways, full-time training for adults destined to the labour force is analogous to an employment situation in that certain standards of achievement and attendance are expected of students, who are usually paid a training allowance to attend. Rather than compromising the standards and regulations governing full-time language training, flexibility could be provided through community-based programs based on the model of the federal government's Settlement Language Training Program. The Government will raise this matter during the renegotiation of the Canada-Alberta Immigration Agreement.

The workplace component suggested in recommendation #5 is now

being offered separately in English in the Workplace programs which are jointly funded by the governments of Alberta and Canada. In recognition of the importance of these programs, the Government of Alberta will consider increasing its level of funding for these programs in 1989-90.

It should be noted that the curricula for full-time ESL programs do contain generic work-related and job-search units. However, to provide an extensive work experience component in full-time language training programs is not feasible, since it is often impossible to predict what occupation an individual will enter on completion of the language training program.

Recommendation #6: Part-time ESL Programs

As indicated in the response to recommendation #4, the Government plans to address the need for a wider spectrum of more universally available part-time programs during the renegotiation of the Canada-Alberta Immigration Agreement.

It should be recognized, however, that considerable flexibility already exists in the offering of part-time ESL programs in Alberta. Courses are available in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings, and on weekends. Some courses are specifically designed for homebound individuals such as homemakers and seniors, and have support provisions such as day care and transportation built in. The institutions and agencies which offer ESL programs attempt to be sensitive to and respond to the specific needs of students. In addition, the ESL Referral Centres operated by Alberta Career Development and Employment in Edmonton and Calgary provide counselling in an immigrant's first language and assist immigrants to obtain support services as needed. Many part-time programs are presently offered by school boards and local agencies and as such are community-based.

Recommendation #7: Recognition of Foreign Credentials

The Government recognizes that adequate equivalency information is vitally important, not only to immigrants themselves but to the Province as a whole. Accreditation permits immigrant women and men to carry on in their chosen careers and gives the Alberta economy the full benefit of the education, training and skills of newcomers.

As the recognition of foreign credentials is an extremely complex issue with many stakeholders, the Government will establish a fact finding Task Force consisting of representatives from appropriate Government departments. Through consultations with immigrant organizations, professional/occupational regulatory bodies, post secondary institutions, other Canadian jurisdictions, and other interested stakeholders, the Task Force will clearly define the problems associated with recognition of foreign credentials and will recommend viable solutions to Government. The Task Force will begin its work immediately and present its final report in one year's time.

In the meantime, the Government will continue to publish its directory of professional/occupational licensing bodies and to distribute it to career centres, immigrant aid agencies, and individuals who counsel immigrants.

With respect to career counselling for immigrant women, please see the response to recommendation #9.

Recommendation #8: Special Training Programs

The Government will work to ensure that the needs of immigrant women are addressed through its current program activity. At present, the Government of Alberta offers a wide range of programs designed to address employment barriers. These programs--which include the Alberta Vocational Training Program,

the Alberta Youth Employment and Training Program, and the Employment Alternatives Program--are open to immigrant women on the same basis as to other Albertans. Similarly, the Alberta post-secondary education system has been developed to provide education and training programs which are open to immigrant women on the same basis as to other Albertans.

Recommendation #9: Special Counselling Programs

All Albertans have access to counselling through the Alberta Career Centres. Rather than developing counselling programs for immigrant women that would duplicate these existing services, the Government will work to ensure that the needs of immigrant women are addressed through the current counselling program.

It should be noted that the Government provides a total of over \$50,000 annually to immigrant women's agencies in Calgary and Edmonton. Both of these agencies offer employment orientation and counselling to their clients. Small sums of money are also provided to immigrant women's groups in Red Deer and Medicine Hat. Overall, the Government provides approximately \$200,000 per year to immigrant aid organizations to support counselling for immigrant men and women. In addition, support services have been developed by post-secondary institutions to provide counselling to people with special needs, such as immigrant women, to ease their transition to post-secondary study. As previously mentioned, the ESL Referral Centres operated by Alberta Career Development and Employment provide counselling in an immigrant's first language with regard to ESL training and assist immigrants to obtain support services.

Recommendation #10: Non-traditional Careers and Apprenticeship

The Government agrees that women should have the opportunity to

choose non-traditional careers and is taking steps toward ensuring that they have that choice. Through the Stepping Stones role model program, for example, junior high students, including immigrant and visible minority students, have the opportunity to explore a variety of non-traditional careers. The Government has also recently established an Equity Initiatives area within the Apprenticeship and Training branch of Alberta Career Development and Employment. The mandate of this area is to develop policies and programs to promote the participation of women, immigrants, and visible minorities, as well as the participation of Natives and the disabled, in non-traditional occupations, particularly the trades.

It is important to note that the apprenticeship program is an industry-based and industry-run program, and that the trades covered by this program are designated by industry. Within this context, an apprenticeship program developed by Government specifically for any one group is not possible. However, through the Equity Initiative area of Alberta Career Development and Employment, the Government will encourage employers to ensure that immigrant women have access to the existing apprenticeship program.

Recommendations #11, #12, and #13: Materials on Family Violence

The Government supports the suggestion of developing materials for immigrant women on the topic of family violence, and will participate in the development of these materials to the full extent possible within available resources. In addition, the Government fully supports the suggestion that immigrant aid and cultural organizations distribute such resource materials.

In conjunction with the Alberta Council on Women's Shelters, the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence has already developed audiotapes for use by abused immigrant women, and is

currently working with the Settlement Program of Alberta Career Development and Employment to complete a brochure designed for immigrant women and their children that will be translated into six languages and be distributed throughout the Province to a variety of organizations.

Other resource materials are also available. For example, the "Families in Alberta" and "Settling in Alberta" booklets are both available in a variety of languages from Alberta Career Development and Employment, and both have sections on family violence and women's shelters. In addition, a recent issue of "English Express", a newsletter produced by Alberta Advanced Education for adults learning to read English, contains a special supplement on family violence.

Recommendation #14: Co-ordination of Cross-Cultural Training

The Government agrees that it can do more to achieve a co-ordinated approach to cross-cultural training between immigrant aid organizations, women's organizations, and women's shelters. The Interagency Committee on Family Violence and Immigrant Women is the ideal vehicle to accomplish such co-ordination.

This Interagency Committee, which was formed in June of 1987, currently consists of representatives from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, Edmonton agencies, and province-wide agencies such as the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, but the Government will expand membership to ensure adequate representation from across Alberta. The mandate of the Committee will continue to be to identify needs and gaps in all services in the area of family violence and immigrant women and to develop appropriate responses in conjunction with other immigrant and social service organizations, women's shelters, and government agencies. The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence will continue to be an active participant in this Committee and will

continue to provide support and assistance as the Committee addresses the need for co-ordination of cross-cultural training as well as other needs.

Recommendation #15: Funding of Women's Shelters

The Government of Alberta is pleased to advise that it has already acted on this recommendation. In June, 1988 the Government committed an additional \$176,000 to women's shelters in Alberta at the request of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. These funds were in addition to the \$300,000 increase for shelters announced in the March, 1988 budget and bring shelter funding in Alberta to 95% of the cost of essential services which include food, clothing, shelter, emergency transportation, and staffing for counselling and child care. Given the great importance of the work done by the Province's shelters, it is understandable that shelters wish to have an even higher level of funding, but the Government cannot move beyond the new funding level at this time. The Government will continue to work with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to meet the needs of women and children in distress in Alberta to the greatest extent possible given the financial realities in the Province.

Recommendation #16: Linguistic Support to Women's Shelters

The Government agrees that linguistic support for women's shelters is an important service for immigrant women in need of shelter protection. Currently, shelters rely primarily on volunteer interpreters who are not always available. This issue merits further discussion with the Alberta Council on Women's Shelters (A.C.W.S.), and the Government would be pleased to discuss it should the A.C.W.S. wish to do so.

RESPONSE REGARDING NATIVE EDUCATION

The Government is gratified to receive the support of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues for Alberta's innovative Native Education Project, and plans to act on the recommendations submitted by the Advisory Council regarding this Project. However, the Government believes that the Native Women of Alberta have other pressing concerns which must also be addressed. Native women and Native women's organizations throughout the Province are actively searching for solutions to social, economic, and health issues of concern to them. They want to resolve these issues and build a strong future for themselves and their people in the community, in the family, in the workplace, and in every other aspect of life in this Province.

As Native women work toward this goal, the Government of Alberta wants to lend its cooperation and support. To this end, the Government will undertake a dialogue with Native women through which they can share with us their priorities, concerns, opinions and solutions on the issues that concern them as Native women. The Government will use the information gathered during these discussions to make solid, informed decisions about programs and services which respond to the needs of Native women.

With respect to recommendations #17 - #23, the Government is pleased to respond as follows.

Recommendation #17: Native Education Project Funding

Native Education Fund grants to individual school boards in Alberta currently range from a high of \$370,000 to the minimum

grant of \$25,000. Although the Government is unable to increase the \$4 million budget for the fund, it will consider increasing the minimum grant by re-structuring the development and contingency portion of the fund.

Recommendation #18: Distribution of Native Education Textbooks

The Government agrees that Native education textbooks should be distributed throughout the Province to all appropriate institutions in order to promote awareness in the Native and non-Native populations, and will carry out this recommendation as soon as feasible.

Recommendation #19 and #20: Liaison Officers

As indicated in the Advisory Council on Women's Issues report, the thrust of the Native Education Policy is one of building partnerships. For example, grants are used for programs decided on co-operatively by a committee of Native parents and the school jurisdiction. In many, though by no means all, cases the liaison officer has been a first choice. Other choices have included tutorial projects, Native language instructors, the establishment of Native Heritage Rooms, cultural field trips, student exchange visits and school visits by community resource people such as local Elders. The Native Education Project has no mandate to direct school jurisdictions and Native parents to choose any particular option.

The Government agrees that where liaison officers exist, they should be given written job descriptions. Many of the responsibilities suggested in Recommendation #20 are already contained in the job descriptions which have been prepared by school jurisdictions throughout the Province. However, the Government believes that in keeping with the community-based

focus of the Native Education Policy, each school jurisdiction employing liaison officers should be responsible for developing its own job descriptions to meet local needs and conditions. A province-wide job description would be unnecessarily restrictive.

It should be noted that liaison officers hired with Native Education Project funds are not the only workers concerned with the well-being of Native youth. The Family and Community Support Services (F.C.S.S.) Community School Liaison Program also provides counselling and support to Native youth and their families. In addition, most Native communities in Alberta have established F.C.S.S. organizations to provide services and programs. The F.C.S.S. program is sufficiently adaptable to allow Native communities to develop programs and services which aim to improve opportunities for Native youth and enhance their well being.

Recommendation #21: Resource Materials on Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The Government is concerned about the high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse among the youth of this Province and has taken steps to decrease the problem. Currently, instruction on alcohol and drug abuse forms part of the health curriculum at the elementary, junior high and senior high school levels, and a variety of resources, including those produced by the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) are available for use in the schools. AADAC also makes resource materials available to communities throughout the Province on request. In addition, AADAC funds a variety of community-based treatment and prevention programs, many of which address issues in the Native community.

Despite these initiatives, the Government believes that more must be done. The Government is actively reviewing A.A.D.A.C.'s role, with a view to enhancing its capability to address the changing preventive and treatment needs of Albertans. As further plans

are developed in this regard, the Government will keep recommendation #21 in mind.

Recommendations #22 and #23: Post-Secondary Education

The Government agrees that Native post-secondary students have special needs. However, unlike primary and secondary schools in the Province, each post-secondary institution operates in an autonomous fashion to prescribe the programs it will offer as well as the content of these programs.

With respect to the special needs of Native students, many excellent programs and services already exist. For example, Native liaison officers are available at AVC-Lac La Biche, AVC-Grouard, CVC-Slave Lake, Grande Prairie Regional College, and the Universities of Alberta, Lethbridge and Calgary. In addition, Alberta Vocational Centres and Community Vocational Centres in Alberta have a special focus on providing programs and services for the educationally disadvantaged and are attended by many Native people. Nevertheless, the Government will increase its efforts to encourage post-secondary institutions to expand and improve their services to Native students.

RESPONSE REGARDING THE WIDOWS' PENSION ACT

Recommendation #24: The Widows' Pension Act

As with any Government program, the Widows' Pension Program is not intended to discriminate against one group or individual but rather to focus limited financial resources in an area of need. The Widows' Pension Program targets the special situation of widows and widowers between the ages of 55 and 64, who find themselves in a difficult position through the loss of a wage-

earning spouse. It is worthwhile to note that governments often choose to target special needs groups and the Widows' Pension Program is, therefore, by no means unique in that regard.

The Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that adequate programs and services are available to meet the economic needs of all citizens. The primary vehicles through which Alberta and all other provinces provide financial assistance to meet the basic necessities of life are their respective social allowance programs. Under Alberta's program, individuals and families finding themselves in need for whatever reason can obtain financial assistance.

With respect to the needs of women, this past summer the Government initiated a public dialogue on the important issue of women's economic equity. Through this project, titled the Alberta Dialogue on Economic Equity for Women, the Government asked Albertans representing a broad spectrum of interests to share their priorities, concerns, opinions and solutions on the issue of women's economic equity. The final report, which will be available early in the new year, will help ensure that Government has a solid basis of understanding for the development or change of policy in this area.