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Anti-poverty advocates oppose criminalization of the poor with 'Safe Streets Act' and 'Trespass to Property Act'

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Source: BCPIAC, End Legislated Poverty

(Vancouver) Anti-poverty organizations are condemning the proposed Safe Streets Act and Trespass to Property Act.

“Being poor is not a crime in British Columbia – at least, not yet,” said Lesley Moore of End Legislated Poverty. “Lorne Mayercourt’s ‘Safe Streets Act’ would strip away the right of poor people to ask for money. It is an attack on the right of the poor to scrape by, and an attack on their Charter-protected right to free speech. Maybe that's why Attorney General Geoff Plant isn't embracing this legislation with the same vigour as his colleagues.”

“These bills have been tabled in the context of catastrophic cuts to social programs” said Bill Burrill of Together Against Poverty Society. “Over the past three years the BC Liberals have cut welfare rates and increased eligibility rules, and slashed housing programs, leaving more people destitute and homeless than ever before. Now they want to criminalize the victims of their cold-blooded policies.”

“While the government has slashed income supports and forced many poor and homeless people to beg in the streets, this legislation would hammer people for doing just that,” said Jim Quail, a lawyer with the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre. “Jail sentences up to 6 months and fines of up to \$2,000 are not solutions to poverty. We don’t like to see the face of poverty – it is an ugly, troubling thing in such an affluent society. Sweeping the poor off the streets and into our jails is a way of dodging the problem, not fixing it.”

Quail pointed out that the “Safe Streets” bill prohibits any form of solicitation in various public places. “A girl guide selling cookies in a parking lot would face arrest under this legislation,” he commented.

For further information, please contact:

- Sarah Khan and Jim Quail, Staff Lawyers, BCPIAC 604-687-3063
- Lesley Moore, End Legislated Poverty 778-885-1399
- Bill Burrill, Together Against Poverty Society 250-361-3521 or 250-382-8135

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