



## **Liberal Party of New Brunswick Response to “Provincial Election 2014 Questionnaire for Political Parties”**

Submitted to: New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc.

On behalf of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick and our current and future elected officials, we wish to thank the Common Front for Social Justice for the opportunity to respond to these questions. It should be noted that our responses reference many of the resolutions passed by our members at the April 2014 policy convention held in Fredericton. These policies will carry weight in developing our platform, but are not guaranteed for inclusion. We are in the process of costing various policy and program options to ensure the platform we develop is both socially progressive and economically responsible.

### ***INCREASE REVENUE***

#### Minimum Wage

The Liberal Party of New Brunswick is committed to supporting the Poverty Reduction Strategy, including measures that address minimum wage. While our platform for the 2014 election is still being finalized, we anticipate including measures that focus on helping our lowest wage earners. It has been disappointing that the current government did not follow the Liberal plan to ensure we are on a level playing field with the rest of Atlantic Canada in this area. The delays in raising the wage are unacceptable to us. Along with minimum wage it is important we focus on improving our education system to provide more economic opportunities for all New Brunswickers. Growing our economy is also critical to achieving that goal.

During the New Brunswick Liberal Party policy convention held in April 2014, resolution 37 to “Support the poverty reduction strategy” was passed. It was resolved that we “give full effect to its recommendations in order to meet the targets set out therein.” To ensure its priority, it was further resolved that the Poverty Reduction Strategy be led by the Office of the Premier.

Minimum wage increases are a part of this plan, as are regular meetings with stakeholders to ensure that minimum wage increases are on par with inflation.

Additionally, the Liberal Party of New Brunswick understands the importance of purchasing power for minimum wage workers. We have reviewed research submitted to the Common Front for Social Justice with regard to indexing minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index. We are also reviewing research

from organizations and academics across the country and are committed to using this evidence to create a better minimum wage policy.

### Social Assistance

The Poverty Reduction plan was introduced in 2009 under a Liberal government with the partnership of both parties. Our goal was to reduce poverty by 25 percent and deep poverty by 50 percent by 2015. One of the goals was to revamp social assistance rates in to help those who need it most. Poverty reduction was and continues to be a top priority for the Liberal Party; we believe governments are defined by how they help citizens who need it most. Unfortunately, the current government has missed many deadlines in the poverty reduction plan, and our social assistance rates are failing to provide the necessary resources to meet basic needs. If we form government in the fall we commit to re-examining social assistance rates and once again making poverty reduction a priority. Poverty reduction is a complex issue with many facets to address, from education to mental health to social assistance rates. These will be a priority for the next Liberal government.

During the New Brunswick Liberal Party policy convention held in April 2014, resolution 50 – “Better economic opportunity for social assistance clients” – was passed. It was resolved that we create “incentives and opportunities for social assistance clients to work without being penalized by increasing the income retention threshold and allowing social assistance clients to work more hours without being penalized.” A modern version would take into consideration critique from the older version of NB Works and include stakeholders’ input.

Additionally, resolution 24 – “Family Policy” – was passed. It was resolved that “a Liberal government would develop a family policy for the province of New Brunswick, which would include improved access to lower-cost and higher-quality childcare, ready access to after-school programs, senior care, and support for caregivers, as well as access to a full range of publicly-funded family planning information and services.”

We believe an all-encompassing family plan will provide greater opportunities for New Brunswickers dependent on social assistance as well as thousands of families who are not recipients of social assistance. We intend to engage all stakeholders as we build this plan.

### Pay Equity

Pay equity in the private sector is an issue that was identified by Liberal party members during consultations which led to a resolution at our recent convention. The resolution called for a future Liberal government to promote pay equity in the private sector by implementing procurement and subsidy policies for firms that wish to do business with the government. It would be required that these businesses have pay equity plans within their firms.

In 2010, the Liberal Party also enacted legislation that applies pay equity within the public sector. A future Liberal government will support pay equity in the public sector and continue to find ways to

ensure women across province are paid the same as men for equal jobs of equal value. We will also establish an arm's length advisory board to advise government on women's issues, including pay equity.

During the New Brunswick Liberal Party policy convention held in April 2014, resolution 25 – "Pay Equity" – was passed. The full resolution is as follows:

*WHEREAS pay equity is defined as equal pay for work of equal or comparable value, and is intended to redress wage gaps in jobs traditionally and predominantly held by women;*

*WHEREAS a significant wage gap persists in New Brunswick, along with concerns regarding the methodology used to determine pay equity adjustments;*

*WHEREAS pay equity legislation currently applies only to the public sector;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government improve the methodology used to determine pay equity adjustments, including accurate job descriptions and market-based wage data;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government use procurement and subsidy policies to promote pay equity in the private sector by requiring firms that wish to do business with government to have pay equity established within their firms.*

Other proactive measures were passed to help establish equity between the genders, including the following:

- Resolution 35. Gender-based analysis: implementing a system of gender-based analysis for the development of all government policies, programs, initiatives, and services.
- Resolution 26. Ensuring representation by women: the appointment of women candidates in ridings where no other contestants have received a green light; better efforts to empower women candidates for the next election and; concrete steps to eliminate structural barriers that prevent women from seeking political office, including the hours of operation of the Legislature.
- Resolution 41. Independent forum for women's issues: ensuring the independence and proper funding of an arms-length advisory body on women's issues.

Better protection for victims of domestic violence was also addressed:

- Resolution 49. Domestic violence: expand the Moncton model [for a Domestic Violence Court] to other regions; study the domestic violence court models in other jurisdictions in search of possible further improvements to be adapted in New Brunswick; undertake a comparative study of sentencing recommendations in New Brunswick and other jurisdictions and; examine legal aid to better respond to the needs of victims of domestic violence.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

## New Brunswick Drug Plan

During the New Brunswick Liberal Party policy convention held in April 2014, resolution 47 – “Clarity on drug plan” – was passed. The resolution recommends that a Liberal government evaluate the costs and structure of the drug plan and explore the possibility of a shared drug plan among Atlantic Provinces to minimize the costs and risks to New Brunswick taxpayers.

The current program is too expensive for low-income families which will make it impossible for many New Brunswickers to pay. The Liberal caucus has been very vocal in their criticism of the high premiums New Brunswickers are obligated to pay under this plan. They have lobbied the Minister of Health to amend the legislation to ensure that low-income New Brunswickers are provided exemptions – an amendment that was rejected. Ensuring the drug plan is accessible to all New Brunswickers is a Liberal priority.

Our Liberal MLA’s have encountered several cases already wherein the proposed drug plan is unduly burdening New Brunswickers. For example, one MLA met a young woman working at a gas station earning roughly \$21,000 annually with a 20 year old daughter at home and still in high school. She was told that her premium will be \$66.67 for her and \$66.67 for her daughter since she’s over the age of 19. This means her premium will cost \$133.34 monthly and \$1600.08 annually. She was not offered any subsidies by government.

In response to this, our MLA called the 1-800 number associated with the new drug program to inquire himself. The woman he spoke with confirmed that there will be no subsidies offered until April 1st, 2015.

As mentioned, the Liberal caucus put forth an amendment for guaranteed subsidies which was voted down by government, as was an amendment to increase the age for dependents. We believe there are serious flaws in the current drug plan and will continue to research ways we can address its shortcomings.

In addition to the drug plan, Liberal Party members addressed several other health issues during the convention. Relevant resolutions passed are as follows:

- Resolution 52. Mental health: re-establish the Mental Health Court and; implement a comprehensive mental health strategy using the McKee report and evidence-based practices in mental health as its foundation.
- Resolution 43. Reform of primary health care: review the primary health care system to ensure better access for New Brunswickers, including through community-based, after-hours care; ensure there is an emphasis on health promotion, disease and injury prevention, primary mental health care, and management of chronic diseases, with a strong link to public health; in support of gender equality, improve access to reproductive health services that meet national standards and respect the Canada Health Act; enhance the role of nurse practitioners, paramedics, pharmacists, and telehealth and; attract and support research and development in these areas.

## Childcare

The Liberal Party of New Brunswick believes that the current government has failed to deliver on its promises with regard to childcare. Resolution 24 – “Family Policy” – was passed at the Liberal policy convention in April 2014. It was resolved that “a Liberal government would develop a family policy for the province of New Brunswick, which would include improved access to lower-cost and higher-quality childcare, ready access to after-school programs, senior care, and support for caregivers, as well as access to a full range of publicly-funded family planning information and services.”

Research and consultation is currently ongoing into childcare access and programming in other jurisdictions. Access to quality and affordable childcare is an issue that Liberal Leader Brian Gallant continues to be passionate about and plans to take action on if elected Premier.

## Home Care

Seniors are a growing segment of our population and a Liberal government recognizes the ever-developing need for better access to homecare. The former Liberal government recognized the importance of our seniors by appointing a minister solely responsible for this group.

The Family Policy resolution passed during our convention is all-encompassing. In addition to childcare, it will also include improved measures and programming for in-home senior care. We know that in-home care is both better for our seniors and is less expensive than other alternatives.

Additionally, resolution 48 – “Seniors’ advocate” – was passed at the Liberal Policy Convention in April. This resolution allows for the creation of the “Office of the Seniors’ Advocate housed within the Ombudsman’s Office.”

Resolution 45 – “Strategy for seniors and long-term care” – was also passed in April. The full resolution is as follows:

*WHEREAS seniors constitute a growing and vibrant segment of our population;*

*WHEREAS opportunities exist through the coordination of many partners in the community, including church groups, seniors centres, non-profits, volunteer groups and all three levels of government;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government work with seniors, their family members, partners in the community and other levels of government to develop a comprehensive strategy to enable seniors to live longer on their own through socializing, being physically and mentally active, having access to proper food, affordable housing, and security;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government investigate the feasibility to use the tax system to support quality home-based care;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government support the development of appropriate public legislation for the Community Based Social Services sector to ensure both fairness and quality in the delivery of services to some of the most vulnerable of the Province's citizens;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government ensure the strategy supports family caregivers, and addresses the skills gap that exists through the continuum of care;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government review policies and procedures related to long-term care through the lens of quality of care and sustainability, not simply dollars and cents.*

As with childcare, specific initiatives on home care are currently being researched for inclusion in the Liberal Family Plan.

### Social Housing and Homelessness

The lack of affordable and adequate housing will be part of the poverty reduction strategy undertaken by a future Liberal government. Improved housing was an important component of the poverty reduction strategy introduced under the former Liberal government. We will explore all avenues to ensure that New Brunswickers have access to clean and affordable living spaces that provide a dignified lifestyle for our most vulnerable citizens.

We will work closely with stakeholders and collaborate with federal and municipal governments to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for families and individuals.

### Literacy

Better education will be the lynchpin of the 2014 Liberal platform. Brian Gallant believes that a better educated, more literate New Brunswick will pave the way to a more prosperous future. Literacy helps unlock individual potential and is a core need to function in today's society. It is unacceptable to the Liberal party that more than 50 per cent of New Brunswick children graduate with functional illiteracy and that we have the lowest literacy rates in Canada. We believe that early learning and intervention are keys to success in this area. At our policy convention this issue was discussed at length. We agreed to support teachers at the elementary level by offering training in literacy best practices. We will make literacy, particularly at the elementary level, a priority. We will provide support for community based programs and instruction methods supported by peer-reviewed evidence. Finally, we will set specific goals for literacy rates and measure the effectiveness of our programs in this area. Our benchmark will be to ensure each child is able to read by grade three.

Two resolutions were passed at the April policy convention that will allow us to work towards improving our abysmal literacy statistics in New Brunswick. They are as follows:

#### *2. Literacy*

*Sources: Ridings, Public Consultations*

*WHEREAS we spend over a billion dollars on education and less than 50% of our children graduate with functional literacy;*

*WHEREAS literacy is key to unlock[ing] individual potential, and [represents] a core ability needed to function in today's economy and society;*

*WHEREAS literacy rates are tied to the building of strong communities, democratic participation, and better health for individuals;*

*WHEREAS New Brunswick has the lowest literacy rates in Canada;*

*WHEREAS businesses and the economy benefit from a more literate workforce through increased productivity and profitability;*

*WHEREAS early teaching and intervention is key to success;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government mandate that teachers in the elementary grades be offered training in literacy teaching best practices;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government focus on literacy rates as a priority, especially elementary literacy, through support for community-based programs and instruction methods that are supported by peer-reviewed evidence;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government set goals for literacy rates and measure the impact of initiatives;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government set goals and benchmarks to ensure each child learns to read by grade three.*

## *7. Tax credit for school volunteers*

*Source: Public Consultations*

*WHEREAS partnerships with businesses and non-profits can improve the quality of programming in schools;*

*WHEREAS it would be valuable to build networks of learning between schools and the labour force;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government establish a tax credit for organizations who allow their employees to volunteer at schools during paid company time.*

## Persons with disabilities

New Brunswick has the second highest rate of persons living with disabilities in the country. Our party believes that people living with disabilities must be afforded opportunities for meaningful work that allow them to live a great life in New Brunswick. We believe it is our job to help get New Brunswickers with disabilities into the workforce when many barriers exist. People with disabilities have the potential to improve the places they work, and accommodation for varying needs should be viewed as an investment not a cost. We have a skills gap in the province and we want people with disabilities to fill these roles.

The Liberal Party recognizes that persons living with disabilities are vulnerable to poverty and living in isolation. We must provide persons with disabilities with the tools and support they need to live independent lives, including finding meaningful employment opportunities.

The following resolution was passed at the April 2014 Liberal policy convention:

*51. Support for persons with disabilities*

*Source: Public Consultations*

*WHEREAS New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in Canada;*

*WHEREAS persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty and isolation from society;*

*WHEREAS the Liberal Party believes in providing persons with disabilities the tools and supports they need to live independent lives;*

*WHEREAS current government assistance does not provide funding for communications tools despite the modern, highly-connected and intercommunicating world;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government enhance the Health Services Program, which provides funding for equipment and supplies for eligible individuals with disabilities to include funding for communications devices;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government increase funding to the New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network's Capacity Fund to assist persons with disabilities in overcoming from poverty;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government enhance means for seniors with disabilities to stay in their homes longer as part of its seniors strategy;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government take steps to ensure children with disabilities are able to fully participate in inclusive physical education programming in the public school system;*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government continue to provide support to the Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation in its research partnership with Ability NB.*

## **A FAIR TAX SYSTEM**

To reintroduce fairness into the New Brunswick tax system, a Liberal policy resolution was passed to increase taxes for the very wealthy. This measure will help generate enough revenue for services that people need and deserve. If elected, a Liberal Government will examine the entire tax system to ensure it is as fair as possible. We want a tax system that does not burden lower-income New Brunswickers yet still generates enough revenue to provide quality services. The resolution reads as follows:

### *31. Additional tax bracket for the wealthy*

*Source: Public Consultations, Caucus*

*WHEREAS New Brunswick currently has four tax brackets, with the top range beginning at about \$125,000;*

*WHEREAS Nova Scotia and British Columbia have a top bracket for incomes over \$150,000;*

*WHEREAS Ontario has a top bracket for incomes over \$500,000;*

*WHEREAS our progressive income tax system is built upon the fundamental concept that those who can pay more, do pay more;*

*BE IT RESOLVED THAT a Liberal government introduce a new fifth tax bracket for the very wealthy.*

## **ADDITIONAL LIBERAL PARTY POLICY RESOLUTIONS CONCERNING OUR COMMITMENT TO POVERTY REDUCTION**

We believe that dozens of the resolutions passed at our April 2014 policy convention can help achieve the goal of reducing poverty in New Brunswick. A full list of our resolutions can be found at this link: <http://nbliberal.ca/liberal-policy-convention-2014/>.

Our **Education** resolutions (1-7) speak to poverty reduction since we believe that support for education, literacy, and post-secondary encourage greater success to a person and society, including the economic health of the province. Reducing poverty through educational support also helps to reduce illiteracy, crime, illness, homelessness, early school leaving, and a host of other social and personal challenges. Additionally, educational investment can help prevent these problems, rather than waiting for them to become problems. Proactivity is more efficient and effective, and shows care for all citizens' wellbeing.

Additionally, our **Vibrant Economy, More Jobs** (8-21) and **Broadening Economic Development Opportunities** (22-28) resolutions focus on poverty reduction because it gives credence to the need for an economic development strategy that consults the people (8), considers regional diversity (9), values the rural resources we too often ignore, exploit, or take for granted (10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17); calls for

sustainable, thoughtful, and wise use of natural resources balancing the needs for jobs and protection of people's health and their natural resources (12, 13, 16, 17); maximizes benefit to ordinary New Brunswickers wherever possible, while also adding new business with support to underdeveloped options like tourism and falling-behind needs like infrastructure (8 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). Resolutions 22-28 demonstrate that the Liberal Party of New Brunswick does not pit the economic health of New Brunswick against the social health of our citizens, and that we fully recognize that these must be developed in tandem and with stakeholders.

Finally, Resolution 40 reiterates our commitment to give full effect to the Duty to Consult with First Nations on issues that affect them; and to improve relations and promote a better understanding of First Nations rights and needs through education and improved engagement opportunities.