

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BC Men's Group Concerned About New Family Maintenance Enforcement Amendments

Nanaimo, BC – May 8th – 2007 Theo Boere, Executive Director of the Nanaimo Men's Resource Centre is extremely concerned about the proposed new amendments to the FMEA (Family Maintenance Enforcement Act – which governs the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program), a part of Bill 33, introduced in the legislature in Victoria on April 25th.

"There are at least 10 amendments in this legislation which will further strengthen the already formidable powers of the FMEP which is responsible for the collection of child support and spousal support." says Boere, "FMEP is essentially a collection agency currently run by an American company under contract to the Attorney General's office. It has far greater powers than other collection agencies with none of the regulations or checks and balances. They can garnishee wages, seize real estate, intercept government agency payments, and prevent the renewal of driver's licenses and passports. Now one of the things they have introduced an amendment to restrict the ability of payers with arrears of over \$3,000. to renew vehicle insurance.

"95% of non-custodial parents, mostly fathers, are very good about making support payments," says Boere, "but sometimes due to unemployment or illness they are temporarily unable to do so. And, when FMEP takes away their ability to get their driver's license or insurance, they have increased challenges in maintaining or acquiring new employment. This is very counterproductive.

"One Nanaimo man's meager bank account was cleared out by FMEP two weeks before Christmas. With his current partner and infant child he was unable to pay rent and forced onto the street. There should be a way to give consideration to special circumstances or new family obligations and appeal some of these decisions without having to go to court.

"There needs to be an external appeal process and a support and advocacy program funded by the government," explains Boere, "This new legislation does not include anything like this nor any of the other 35 recommendations we suggested to the government in January."

"We are also concerned that even though there is enforcement of support payments there is no enforcement for denial of access to visitation for non-custodial parents." says Boere, "The financial needs of the child are very important but the needs for access and contact for both of the parents is just as important. Liberal access is crucial in maintaining a healthy relationship between parents and children."

"The FMEP and family court system is so convoluted that many lawyers can't figure it out, how are lay people supposed to understand how to wade through the list of rules, guidelines, and legaleze?" says Boere, "It is a very difficult and unfair system. Men commit suicide 8 times more frequently than women during the process of separation and divorce. I believe that some of the stress of this situation is due to the harshness of the system and of FMEP actions."

In the past five years the Nanaimo Men's Centre - one of only three centres in Canada - has provided programs including: individual counseling and group sessions for men and women, divorce and separation support, anger management programs, emergency housing, and education and training services. They have also produced newsletters, booklets and instructional video tapes. The centre is also in partnership with Malaspina University College to research male depression and suicide, particularly during the process of separation and divorce.

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