



MOMS STOP THE HARM

Honourable Niki Sharma
Attorney General
PO Box 9044 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

November 23rd, 2023

RE: Request for investigation into public funding for private recovery treatment that has contributed to the death of clients and mounting allegations of abuse

Dear Minister Sharma,

We are writing to request an immediate investigation into the transfer of millions of public dollars from the provincial government to private recovery programs *with little or no government oversight*.

We, as supporters of regulated, accessible substance use treatment and voluntary support programs, are alarmed that the provincial government continues to blindly fund an industry without addressing the countless allegations of abuse, sexual assault, and deaths of vulnerable clients that have been revealed at these programs.

Among several other grants, a total of [\\$270,000](#) was granted directly to Westminster House Society in 2022, [\\$100,000](#) was granted directly to the Last Door Recovery Society in 2019 for a “[Building Recovery Capital campaign](#),” and over [\\$2,500,000](#) was granted to Phoenix Society through the Fraser Health Authority in the 2022 fiscal year.

This \$2.87 million in funding is just a small sample of public taxpayer money gifted to the industry by the BC government between 2016–2023, much of which has yet to be publicly disclosed, such as the [\\$50,000 and \\$272,000](#) grants promised to Last Door and Westminster House in the spring of 2023. This occurred after allegations of assault linked to these sites had been reported publicly by [The Vancouver Sun](#).

We speak from personal experience as mothers and parents who have had their children die during or shortly after their stay at these costly treatment sites and recovery houses. If the government continues to abandon its commitments to harm reduction in favour of diverting public funds towards this unregulated industry, we demand immediate accountability for the continued harm these programs perpetuate.

As you likely know, the private recovery industry is highly profitable for operators and investors alike. This is in part due to the deregulation of the industry, which [happened in 2002 during Kevin Falcon's tenure as Minister of State for Deregulation \(2001–2004\)](#). Falcon, now leader of the BC United Party, maintains close connections to the industry. Alongside fellow BC United MLA Elenore Sturko, Falcon [publicly demonstrated their party's support of Last Door Addiction Treatment Centre](#). Last Door was recently the subject of a police investigation.

For these reasons, we are also asking for an investigation into the support of these organizations by staff members of the BC United Party, including Kevin Falcon. Falcon has moreover [never addressed allegations](#) that clients of the Northern BC Therapeutic Community (formerly the Baldy Hughes Therapeutic Community and Farm) were coerced into making campaign calls for Falcon's failed leadership bid in 2011.

The public became aware of the decade-long allegations of abuse at Westminster House through a media investigation by [the CBC](#), dated June 7th, 2023. Eleven victims came forward describing the harm inflicted upon them by program staff:

"It doesn't seem like there was any accountability when people were trying to blow the whistle," said one survivor, AB, whom [Westminster House staff member] Haber is charged with assaulting in July 2013. Her name is protected by a publication ban.

In the CBC article, a former Westminster House executive director stated that the allegations are "sickening" and apologized for "turning a blind eye" to systematic abuse and sexual coercion in the program, which was described as an "open secret" by multiple alleged victims.

Many people die at these sites or shortly after leaving or being evicted from them. This alarming fact is not tracked by formal government bodies and the BC Coroner's office is not empowered to pursue these deaths. This a deliberate consequence of deregulating the industry.

In a [July 16, 2023 investigation by The Breach](#), the BC Coroner’s office, acknowledged that “there are no provincial regulations for evidence-based standards for addiction treatment in B.C., nor are outcomes monitored or evaluated.”

In an [interview with The Breach](#) on September 13, 2023, a representative of Fraser Health said that although they did have a role in allocating millions in public funds to these organizations, they stated “I don’t have any additional information to share with you” when asked for criteria and whether healthcare workers that support these referrals are made aware of issues of abuse at recovery sites, including [the allegations directed at Westminster House](#).

On behalf of all concerned BC residents, we demand a forensic audit into these abusive treatment programs and recovery houses which continue to be allowed to operate using public funds. Enough is enough.

We are deeply concerned that your government is planning on expanding funding to these programs despite reports showing [eight people died](#) at just one site, while [three people died at another](#) run by the same organization in just the last three years. Again, these programs continue to receive public funds to this day. And now, your government is moving forward with an [extremely costly recovery program](#) based on these same harmful models. This program is funded in partnership with [wealthy donors who lack any clear substance use expertise](#), a fact widely reported by the media.

The government’s ongoing policy direction towards private treatment and recovery programs persists despite [wide-ranging studies](#) showing that the dangerous outcomes of these programs will only compound as the drug toxicity crisis worsens.

We are asking you to launch an immediate investigation into this concerning activity in the for-profit recovery industry, including:

1. An independent investigation into the harm, abuse, and premature death inflicted upon clients of any and all treatment programs in BC which have received government funding;
2. A forensic audit of any treatment programs in BC which have received government funding and are alleged to perpetuate abuse and harm;
3. An independent investigation into any and all donations received by BC United and its staff from the treatment and recovery industry;

4. Empowering the BC Coroners Service to start tracking deaths that occur at treatment programs and recovery houses;
5. Immediately begin evaluating outcomes of substance use recovery treatment programs, including through desegregated race-based data;
6. Urgently implement regulations onto existing treatment programs, ensuring all health authorities making referrals are aware of ongoing issues of abuse prior to sending a client to these sites;
7. A forensic audit to determine if any recovery house in BC is abusing shelter portions of income assistance cheques by evicting people just prior to cut off.

Without adequate government oversight and regulation, the rapidly-growing treatment and recovery industry is set on a dangerous path that will further endanger the lives of thousands of British Columbians.

Not only are program participants exposed to abuse and mistreatment, but as these allegations continue to emerge without proper redress, treatment and recovery will be further delegitimized and discredited as a voluntary option for care. The more public funds are recklessly allocated to this deregulated industry, the less likely will be successful for their potential clients.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to hearing from you in the immediate future.

Sincerely,

Moms Stop the Harm BC

cc:

Elenore Sturko, BC United Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Addiction, Recovery & Education, and MLA, Surrey South

MLA Adrian Dix, Minister of Health

Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health, Government of BC

Bonnie Wilson, Director, Vancouver Coastal Health & Board Member, Phoenix Society

MLA Adam Olson, BC Green Party

MLA Michael de Jong, Shadow Minister for Attorney General

MLA Shirley Bond, Shadow Minister for Health