



Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Mr. Scott Crocker
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Dear Mr. Crocker:

Thank you for your letter to follow up on points in our Blue Book regarding services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I will answer each of your questions in turn.

Use of IQ 70 to Determine Service Provision for Adults with ASD:

We believe the current practice of using a person's IQ score as a criterion for determining the need for support services and programs is exclusionary and discriminatory.

Q: Do you have a timeline in mind for the actual removal of IQ70 and how will you accommodate the needs of those who have been denied services for years?

We would like to see this unfairly discriminatory criterion removed immediately. It serves only to deny services to those who would benefit. We have mentioned an investment of \$2.5 million to achieve this as part of an Autism Strategy. We have also designated \$5 million for the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and \$13 million for the Collins Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, which deals with inclusion. How these funds are allocated is to be determined, based on collaboration and evidence. Immediately removal of the criterion might be expected to create an immediately under-capacity of services, given the increased demand. We will have to determine how to manage and address this so children in need of services are not deprived. We understand that early and effective intervention is a critical, so the best strategy may be to consider what other leading jurisdictions have done and make decisions on collaboration with the

community of those most directly impacted. Whatever we do, it must be focused on better access and outcomes for those in need of services, and it must be done collaboratively and accountably. If we agree to work together in the best interests of those who need care, we can report continual progress.

Screening, Timely Referral and Early Identification:

We believe early identification is critical to positive outcomes for individuals with ASD and, therefore, evidence-based screening and surveillance practices must be implemented provincially.

Q: What is your position on additional tools for developmental screening to ensure those flagged for early signs of ASD receive timely and appropriate referrals? Further, will your party consider allocating funding for a Public Information Campaign about early signs of autism?

Those I have consulted with tell me early identification and intervention is indeed critical for positive outcomes. So yes, I agree that evidence-based screening and surveillance practices must be implemented provincially. Parents, healthcare providers, child care providers and educators have the most interaction with children and ought to be informed about the early signs of autism. I see the wisdom of sponsoring a public education campaign to alert people to these early signs. It is then for professionals to do the screening and make referrals as appropriate. None of this is done simply or without preparation. We need to bring people around the table to discuss how best this can be achieved, and then use those discussions to chart a course. If we make this a priority, which I believe we should, then we should be able to set to work within the initial months of the administration's mandate. This initiative will mesh with the work of the Premier's Task Force on Health Care and the ongoing implementation of the Collins Task Force on improving educational outcomes.

Accountability with ISSP/IEP process:

We believe students with ASD need enough appropriate supports to thrive in the learning environment. This must include those who are struggling, as well as those who are gifted.

Q: How do you plan to increase accountability with the ISSP and IEP process?

The most recent examination of the learning environment with respect to inclusion was the Collins Task Force. I wonder if adjustments in approach may be needed in light of the work to develop the Autism Strategy and the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. Certainly we must keep the lines of communication open with parents to ensure there is constant feedback and accountability. I will give a Minister or Ministers the mandate to ensure this is handled effectively, transparently, accountably, responsively, collaboratively - in all the ways it needs to be handled so such a complex undertaking can improve circumstances and not go off the rails. We will rely on the Autism Society for guidance and patience as we endeavor to enable students with ASD to thrive in the learning environment – which is the goal we share.

Employment Equity:

We believe all those on the autism spectrum, with a goal of employment, should have the opportunity to obtain and maintain 'real work for real pay'.

Q: What steps would you take to improve access to the workforce for those with ASD?

Opening up opportunities in the workforce for those on the autism spectrum will be one of the goals of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. But is also an endeavor that will prove to be a learning experience for all of us. To avoid the pitfalls, we will need guidance. We will need to learn from others who have paved the way. As I understand it, the autism spectrum is very broad, so the spectrum of opportunities is also very broad. With early intervention through an effective Autism Strategy, we can prepare individuals along the way for 'real work for real pay'.

But in the meantime, while the young are growing, there are adults who are hoping to enter the workforce, or already there. We need to hear the success stories and learn from the stories that have not been as successful. We need to bring together educators, employers, specialists, caregivers and those on the autism spectrum to engage in dialogues about ways to proceed. Pilot projects may be valuable.

Regardless, we need you at the table, leading and guiding. This is about changing people's lives. Let's never lose focus on that, but strive to make gains that will serve as examples and set the pace.

Yours sincerely,



Ches Crosbie

Leader of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador