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Capital region MLAs, MPs back plan to combat poverty

[Sarah Petrescu](#) / Times Colonist

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Victoria MLA Carole James addresses politicians and community groups during a discussion about poverty on Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2014. Photograph by: DARREN STONE, Times Colonist

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All 10 Greater Victoria MLAs and members of Parliament have endorsed a community coalition's plan to combat poverty.

"We do need senior levels of government to support this effort. It's too important to be divided by partisan issues," Rupert Downing, executive director of the Community Social Planning Council, said at a news conference Tuesday.

The council, made up of 60 Greater Victoria organizations and businesses, developed a broad Community Action Plan on Poverty that identifies key areas of need and specific ideas to help support struggling families and individuals — including affordable housing, livable incomes, food security, education and health care.

The group, which was formed in 1936 to help alleviate the effects of the Great Depression, plans to roll out a number of initiatives this year and began this month by announcing a fund that will use Retired Registered Saving Plan investments to support affordable housing.

A initiative on child poverty is expected in March, to be followed by one for families, Downing said.

On Tuesday, politicians and service providers spoke about their commitment to the plan — both in their communities and in their legislatures. However, none of the politicians belongs to a governing party.

Victoria NDP MLA Carole James said she will continue to lobby for a provincial poverty reduction plan when the legislature sits again this February: “We need to put a focus on measuring poverty because what gets measured, gets attention.”

Andrew Weaver, freshman Green party MLA for Oak Bay-Gordon Head, said he plans to focus on a tax loophole that allows the wealthy to avoid property transfer taxes through the use of a bare trust.

“We are losing tens of millions of dollars in taxes that could help fund programs,” Weaver said.

He also spoke about the need for youth mental-health initiatives, saying: “Prevention is a key component of any poverty reduction strategy.”

Randall Garrison, NDP MP for Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca and a former member of the council, said his focus will be on cost-free, simple initiatives that have big impacts, such as restrictions on payday loans, credit-card interest rates and ATM fees.

This spring, his office will also hold public workshops to help residents with disabilities take advantage of assistance programs.

The council said it has reached out to several B.C. Liberal MLAs for endorsement of its plan and are waiting for their feedback.

For more information on the Community Action Plan on Poverty, go to caponpoverty.ca.

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Politicians onside

Federal and provincial politicians who have endorsed the Community Action Plan on Poverty:

Members of Parliament

- Randall Garrison, Esquimalt-Juan de Fuca
- Elizabeth May, Saanich-Gulf Islands and Leader of the Green party
- Murray Rankin, Victoria

MLAs

- Rob Fleming, Victoria-Swan Lake
- Gary Holman, Saanich North and the Islands
- John Horgan, Juan de Fuca
- Carol James, Victoria-Beacon Hill
- Maurine Karagianis, Esquimalt-Royal Roads

- Lana Popham, South Saanich
- Andrew Weaver, Oak Bay-Gordon Head

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