

To: Premier Campbell
From: Families for School Seismic Safety

Thank you for your prompt response to our letters on the school seismic issue. There are several key points, which we would like to address.

We met with you in September, along with Andy Mill the Head of the Seismic Task force of APEG (Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists). At our meeting, you stated that you liked our approach and you were pleased that we had brought the engineering community to help lay out new solutions to this serious problem and that we were also seeking federal funding. You expressed a genuine concern for the gravity of the situation and a keen interest in new solutions. Your response does not acknowledge the discussion that took place and gives the impression that you are satisfied with the status quo. If things don't change, at the present rate of funding, it could take 60 years to retrofit schools; we hope that you share our conviction that this is unacceptable.

In your letter, you refer to the \$611 million, 3-year capital budget for BC schools. It is my understanding that this is a net decrease in school infrastructure funding compared with the preceding 3 years.

The life-safety of children is not an educational issue. It is a safety and infrastructure issue and therefore should receive separate funding. The Province should be looking to partner with the federal government in obtaining infrastructure money and making this work part of our National Disaster Mitigation Strategy.

The advantages of cost-effectiveness and the centralization of expertise have been lost by decentralizing this work. We propose that the advantages of centralization be regained by having the entire engineering community come together (through APEG) to define a standardised and peer-reviewed methodology for assessing and addressing seismic risk to our school buildings. This would see to it that the work proceeded in an objective and scientific manner from an agreed upon master list of priorities.

The engineering community is in agreement that the assessments in hand, some from the 1980's, are an unreasonable basis upon which to proceed with this work. There have been many new developments in the field of seismic structural engineering recently, including a better understanding of soil mechanics. This information must be incorporated into the new approach. A new approach could also see considerable cost savings. We applaud Minister Clark's recent commitment to a provincial seismic review of schools. We would encourage the minister to ask the experts at the leading edge of this field to define an assessment tool so that we can use our money as wisely as possible. Our priority should be to preserve the life-safety of children across the province as rapidly as possible.

This work should not be permitted to ebb and flow with changes in the tides of school boards or governments. This work must be completed over a 10-15 year time frame from today. Why should our children's life safety be compromised because of a fluke of architectural history, which led to schools unwittingly being built of some of the worst possible materials for a zone of high seismic risk? Just because the unsafe buildings in this case happen to be schools, does not make this an educational issue - it is an infrastructure issue.

After the collapse of school buildings in Italy last fall and in Turkey last spring, Dr. Ben Wisner (of the Benfield Grieg Hazard Research Center, University College London) was prompted to state the obvious:

"The basic question is why again and again, even in affluent, industrial countries such as Italy. . . with a great wealth of engineering and other expertise, schools collapse in moderate earthquakes. What I'd say right away is that a middle-income developing country should have

every, that is EVERY school . . . inspected and where necessary reinforced. This is so basic to risk mitigation in a seismically active area it seems foolish to have to write it down"

FSSS will continue to work with senior levels of government in order to find a solution acceptable to all. Please commit your government to working with the entire engineering community (through APEG) to define an objective, scientific and cost-effective new approach. Please commit your government to the development of a School Building Seismic Safety Program that will lay out a road map for addressing this serious problem, before it's too late.

Help us to keep our children safe.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tracy Monk