

Video Transcript

Narrator Forrest Smith: Early language access for age zero to five, deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind in British Columbia. Today I want to take some time to really explain clearly some of the background and what's happening recently. Call for responses (CFR) is the term you will be seeing. We're gonna start with Sarah, who is going to explain what a CFR is. CFR is a call for responses. Generally, the government will want to buy services or things, and services that the government of British Columbia will buy, for example, early language acquisition services for the province for children aged zero to five, buy the service by posting a bid on BCBid and asking any organizations or businesses if they're interested in providing early language access services. And which organizations are then interested would answer the questions in the requirement of the CFR.

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The government lays out what they want. The business feels that they can meet those objectives, and they provide a. The government then will review all of those submissions and find the one that is the best fit. They have a point system and a rating system then that moves on to a negotiation stage. And once they've come to an agreement, they make a commitment, sign a contract, and give the money to provide for the province. for a period of. This is a 56-page document. This document is really wow, it's wonderful! I'll give you an example; just pick a few different things. It's too much to go through 56 pages, so I'll just pick a few examples. This section here outlines all of the different ways that the information was populated in the document. This section strengthens ASL as a foundation.

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We have that the service provider requires an ASLPI of level four, which means that that addresses their sign language abilities for the professionals that are working with the deaf children. We expect them to be fluent in sign language to an ASL PI level. four Bilingual is defined in the And it talks about being able to know ASL and another language. These are some examples that I've picked to show you. This document, last week, we found out was a shock. No reason provided. And the CFR is usually found on this site, which is BCBID. Remember, Sarah was recently explaining BCBID? This is what it looks like. And here, the update to this says, if you can see it says canceled. So that's the evidence that it was.

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I just wanted to take some time to explain some of the history to give a little bit more understanding. Previously, there were three organizations for age zero to five BC Family Hearing. Resource Society, kind of more of an old total communication style of philosophy. Deaf Children's Society, of which would use ASL, and then Children's Hearing and Speech Center, more of an oral approach. These were the three organizations that we all know in the community that provide services. And around 2014, 2015, there was an RFP. An RFP is kind of

like a CFR, a little similar, a little different, but the same kind of process: request for proposal. And remember, I explained those three organizations; it became one. So only one would get funding. Previously, there were three different organizations that would get funding to provide services.

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and this changed it so that it would be one. And those two other organizations then were subcontractors. At that time, BC Families won the and have provided services since about 2015 until still to this day, almost 10 years. Dr. Noreen Simmons, I've met her before. I remember meeting her when they won the bid, and I made a suggestion to say that she should hire someone in a leadership position, a director, or someone that was deaf and fluent in sign language to work closely with her. And she seemed to kind of dismiss that, and I've not seen that happen over the last decade. Maybe two, three, or four years ago remember seeing a that encouraged parents' choice but seemed to encourage ASL to be the last choice as most parents would want to choose a different method.

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Now the contract they've had the RFP from the original in 2015, and it's been extended and extended, and here we are in 2025. And according to the CFR, it should be expiring in 2025. And that's why I believe that this posting on BC Bid for the new CFR happened. And I wanna just talk about who's responsible for the development of the CFR, and it's the BC Provincial Government. They have many different branches of government, and this was developed by the Ministry for Children and Family Development, MCFD. MCFD then has different branches and PDHHS Provincial Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services is one of the programs that MCFD is responsible for, and we know that they have the dorm and family services. Part of the early intervention contract is managed by PDHHS. So, at that time when the CFR was Susi Bolender, she was the chief of the board, was there as director in 2022 to 2024, and her boss was Jennie Ireland.

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Susi was working at PDHHS, and at that time there was a, when she started a provincial or a program review that identified three areas. Early intervention was an identified area: early intervention services and programs from that. review there was Susie had to collect all of the and provide the information from all the stakeholders, hired experts, and contracted a who provided feedback and worked with a informed them about deaf culture and deaf professionals to develop that. And Susie wanted to share her feelings on the cancellation.

Hello, I am the former director of PDHHS. And during that time, I was part of the development of the CFR. Finding out it was canceled was a great shock. We cannot drop this program. It was so important that it was over two years of work.

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Different experts were involved, collecting all of this data, information, and research on deaf education and early intervention. And it was really crafted so perfectly. And now, at the last minute, to drop that, I mean it had assessments and accountabilities, and it was based on best practices. There was so much information that went into forming that document, and language acquisition was the absolute most important thing to support. To drop that without explanation is just not acceptable.

And here we have a message from a hearing parent of a deaf child. Well, this is a real challenge to learn about this. Finding the resources to support my child as a parent of a deaf child. The CFR, when I saw it, wow, it was such a valuable document.

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and people could really learn how they could figure out different ways to talk to their kids and interact with their children. And many people who are working with deaf children, a lot of them don't even know sign language. So how are these children supposed to really thrive without that exposure? We have to make sure that there's equal language and quality language to see these kids really, really do their best.

And here's a message from David, who is the father of a deaf son and also very successful. David just wants to share his thoughts. Did you see the picture just shared? That was my mother and that child is me in the. bonding with my mother through sign language. My mother's passed away, and I'm very touched to think about the generations of deaf children and how we communicate through signs. It's such an important language and important for communication.

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Now we've got Nigel Howard, if you remember him from COVID and keeping your distance; he will talk about language deprivation and language acquisition. Here's Nigel. Any person, and speaking specifically a person who is, you know, as they grow up, they require language stimulation, language exposure. And when we think about what language deprivation is, it means that that exposure to Language is not there. If you think about a hearing baby, for example, that is born and you speak to it and you expose it and you give it all of this auditory ability, that becomes a part of its character, its developing esteem, self-esteem, having a strong sense of self, so that they can move forward with all those tools through their life.

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And then, if you imagine a deaf child who is born, and you know, sometimes there's uncertainty about what to do and how to parent that child, speech therapy, listening, hearing aids, sometimes sign language, all these different ways of communicating, there's not been one clear exposure of language. to develop that same sense of. So this child grows up feeling uncertain, maybe of who they are or their identity might be, and you know they end up feeling like they just

don't know where they fit or what they should be doing. Their quality of life might be a little bit stunted as they're not sure how to make their way with all of these different messagings as they grow up through their life. So, language getting exposure to language and then not having it really causes harm.

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Now we'll have Joe McLaughlin talk about social justice. Social justice means that you really have full, equal participation in all groups and it meets the needs of those groups. And the society contributes funding to different causes in an equal way, and all members of those groups feel safe. And two lead to the basic rights of deaf children and people, and it depends on ASL accessibility and assuring that there are equal services. Whether it's a large group or a small group, all should be treated fairly and have equitable services. As a group, we have developed a letter to send to the ministry to ask for an explanation on why the CFR was canceled and demanding that it should be kept and reinstated. Here is an explanation of our letter.

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This is the letter that was sent and Sarah. will sign the letter so that you know what it says. There was a lot of excitement from deaf professionals, educators, families looking forward to the CFR, and really it was quite a shock to see it cancelled without explanation. We believe that it's important to reverse the decision and reinstate the CFR, early language, and access to intervention services. That CFR was supportive of children who were deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind, who struggled with language deprivation and would provide a real framework for reducing that. It is so important that the next step is to consult deaf-led, community-based organizations and individuals so that the CFR process can be reinstated so that the experience and lives of these deaf children are supported.

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We are asking for a 30-minute sit-down to really understand the rationale behind cancelling the CFR, and we want quick action. The language assessments that were in the CFR were really groundbreaking to support the language acquisition and early language development of deaf children, and we want to preserve that. We're flexible on the time, and we will be providing an ASL interpreter to attend that meeting. Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing children, we want the language access of their needs to be just as important and valued as others. And we want to work together with the government as community leaders to ensure that. We developed a second letter to get your support in the form of a petition. This is the letter that was sent to community partners and the petition is ready for signatures in support of this cause.

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Lisa Anderson will take a moment to explain why the 0 to 5 language access is so valuable. The future generations of deaf-led individuals must be supported. Now is the time to, if you're in agreement with the following points on the petition, please review it and sign your add your name to this cause. Click the link and add your name. Secondly, there is another link which you

can open up, which has an email draft that is ready, and you add your name and address so that those emails will go to a list of important people in government. It's so important that these deaf children zero to five have language exposure, their language, and together we stand to support language equity.

Forrest: Here's the email address if you have any questions, and you can scan this QR code from your phone to sign the petition. Thank you for watching.