

■ Health care

Autism appeal outrages MLAs

by Jordan Bateman
REPORTER

The provincial government has decided to appeal a B.C. Supreme Court decision ordering the funding of Lovaas treatment for autistic children.

And that has local autism activism group Families for Early Autism Treatment of B.C. and MLAs Rich Coleman and Lynn Stephens angry.

"The decision to appeal is shameful," said Langley MLA Stephens. "It's not only shameful, it's unconscionable."

"This disgusts me completely," said Fort Langley-Aldergrove representative Coleman. "I'm so mad."

Coleman said that the Lovaas treatment has been "proven to be a benefit," adding that when the Alberta government lost a similar Lovaas case, it immediately instituted the treatment.



STEPHENS
Langley MLA

"This government should make the decision to fund," Coleman said. "This is a health and social issue and it is totally unfair to the autistic children and their families. It's really disgusting."

Stephens and FEAT BC representatives said it was difficult enough to swallow the idea that the government wanted a judicial review of whether funding the Lovaas treatment was legal. But to now have to sit through an appeal — after receiving a judgment that the government does, indeed, violate the rights of autistic children by denying them medically necessary treatment — is barbaric.

"Now that they have the decision they so firmly requested, they refuse to abide by it, and instead are embarking on further delays and legal maneuvering," said a FEAT BC news release. "As a result, children who desperately need treatment for their condition are again being denied."

Stephens said the government may be "stalling for time" because it simply can't afford to implement the costly treatment.

Dr. Ivar Lovaas pioneered the therapy that is based on the idea that autistic people don't learn from their environment, and the blockage often leads to inappropriate language and negative behaviour.

Costly therapists are needed to work with the children one on one, for up to 40 hours a week, to break down these blockages.

"There should be a tremendous public outcry over this," said Stephens. "This tragically affects so many families and children and clearly shows that health care is not a priority of this government."



COLEMAN
Fort Langley MLA