



News Release

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REPRESENTATIVE CALLS ON B.C. GOVERNMENT TO MAKE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES TO CARE SYSTEM

VICTORIA – The British Columbia government should begin providing appropriate care for children and youth who have multiple vulnerabilities – including developmental, psychological and medical needs – Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said today as she released her latest report.

Who Cares? B.C. Children with Complex Medical, Psychological and Developmental Needs and their Families Deserve Better shows that young people with complex needs in this province continue to be placed in inappropriate residential placements, with negative and sometimes tragic outcomes.

“These children and their families who need the most support are often the least well served by the province’s care system,” Turpel-Lafond said. “The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) must make fundamental changes in order to ensure that all children have their needs met in a loving, permanent setting that includes, wherever possible, input and involvement of their families.”

The report, an aggregate review of 31 critical injuries and deaths of children in care, includes interviews with service providers and youth perspectives. The report recommends the creation of a new class of foster and shared care that would permit, when appropriate, shared guardianship between family members and MCFD and allow parents a continuing hand in the care of their children while also keeping the children in their homes and communities whenever possible.

This is not the first time the Representative has addressed the issue of inappropriate care for vulnerable children and youth. In fact, in the 2013 report *Who Protected Him? How B.C.’s Child Welfare System Failed One of Its Most Vulnerable Children*, the Representative recommended that the Province take immediate steps to ensure a full continuum of care be provided for B.C.’s children. That report centered on the case of an 11-year-old boy with complex needs who was poorly served by the system and, eventually, came to the attention of the Representative after being tasered by police.

“It has been nearly two years since I recommended that MCFD urgently address the serious gaps in residential services,” Turpel-Lafond said. “I am disappointed that we still see the ministry failing to properly serve and respect the rights of children and their families in this province. It is past time to take action in this regard.”

Today’s report finds that most children and youth with complex needs in residential care lacked the assessments, plans and access to treatment and services necessary to meet their needs. The result, illustrated in eight case examples, are life experiences marked by frequent moves, lack of stability, unaddressed medical and developmental needs, and a general drift towards aging out of care without proper supports or planning.

“The lack of a continuum of care means not only poor outcomes for these young people, but also a staggering loss of potential,” Turpel-Lafond said. “Children and adolescents are remarkably resilient, and with strong emotional, cultural and behavioural supports and a fully funded and staffed system of services, much more positive outcomes are possible.”

The Representative also recommends creation of an oversight body with representation from parents, Aboriginal communities and leadership, and senior government officials in MCFD, Health and Education to help develop and oversee a consistent framework for residential care. Also recommended are regular audits by the Provincial Director of Child Welfare of contractors providing residential care services to ensure compliance with ministry standards and maintain quality assurance for those providing care for children in B.C. Audits should ensure that operational and staffing decisions in residential facilities are made with the child’s best interests and developmental needs – rather than cost-drivers – as the only consideration.

The report can be accessed at <https://www.rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications>

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