



July 22, 2009

Government accepts recommendations to enhance transparency and accountability in the child and youth advocacy system

Edmonton... Ten recommendations to strengthen the child and youth advocacy system, and balance the benefits of individual advocacy and the need for public transparency and accountability, have been accepted by the Alberta government.

“The recommendations will enhance the child and youth advocacy system in Alberta by continuing to provide support to individuals while providing more transparency to Albertans,” said Children and Youth Services Minister Janis Tarchuk. “The recommendations recognize that while it is important for the public to be able to see that our system is operating effectively, it is also critical to ensure that young people receiving services from our ministry continue to have a strong voice. We have accepted all of the recommendations and implementation will begin immediately.”

Tarchuk initiated a review of the child and youth advocacy system in the province in November 2008. A committee of nine members internal and external to government, including young adults formerly in care, studied practices in other jurisdictions and heard from key stakeholders to develop their report and recommendations.

The recommendations are based on the findings of the review committee in five areas - individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, natural and professional advocacy, reporting practices, and reporting relationship. The panel has called for changes including:

- Suggesting that the Child and Youth Advocate’s annual report be referred each year to the All-Party Policy Field Committee on Health, following its tabling in the Legislature.
- Establishing an expert advisory committee of youth and other key stakeholders to enhance the identification and validation of systemic issues and actions in the child welfare system.
- Redesigning the reports that the Advocate is required to submit on a quarterly basis to the Minister. The Minister has also committed to publicly releasing future quarterly reports.
- Developing a memorandum of understanding to formalize the roles of the Advocate, ministry, and Minister.

“The fundamental questions we continually asked ourselves when we were forming the recommendations were: will this result in better outcomes for children and youth receiving child welfare services in the province; will this increase transparency in the child welfare system; and will this strengthen the accountability of the Advocate,” said review committee chair and acting assistant deputy minister at Children and Youth Services, Mark Hattori.

The committee also developed a longer-term vision for child and youth advocacy in the province, ensuring children and youth remain the focus, providing more clearly defined core functions for the Advocate, and fostering improved cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders in the advocacy system.

“Our review of other jurisdictions and discussions with various stakeholders found that reporting structure, in and of itself, did not necessarily result in greater public accountability and transparency,” said review committee member and past-president of the Child Welfare League of Canada and International Forum for Child Welfare, Bruce Rivers. “Alberta children and youth in care have access to a very good system that will serve them in an even greater capacity once the recommendations are implemented.”

“Alberta’s real strength in advocacy is placing significance on the individual voice of children and youth,” added external review panel member and a former recipient of children and youth services, Stephen Clarke. “Advocates often represent children and youth who have never had the opportunity to have their voice heard as equals when decisions regarding them are being made. We found that this individual emphasis is both highly effective in bringing about positive outcomes for youth and highly valuable to all parties involved.”

The review panel report and recommendations can be found at www.child.alberta.ca/advocacyreport.

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Backgrounders:

Review recommendations and implementation plan
Review committee member biographies

Media inquiries may be directed to:

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Advocacy system review recommendations and implementation

Review Panel Recommendation	Ministry Response	Ministry/Advocate
<p>1. The Annual Report of the Child and Youth Advocate should be referred on an annual basis to the Policy Field Committee on Health (PFCH) for consideration, following being tabled in the Legislature.</p> <p>With an established process of accountability to the PFCH, the review committee believes that the Advocate should continue to report to the Minister.</p>	Accepted	<p>The Advocate will prepare and present his 2009-10 Annual Report to the Minister, who will table the report in the Legislature.</p> <p>The Policy Field Committee on Health will then have the option to review the annual report.</p>
<p>2. Quarterly reports should be redesigned to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clearly tracking service issues ● Reporting the resolution of those issues ● Identifying potential system issues and actions and serve as a basis for an annual report. 	Accepted	<p>The Advocate, department, child and family services authorities (CFSAs) and delegated First Nation agencies (DFNAs) have entered into discussions to help determine the content and format of future quarterly reports.</p> <p>Introduction of the redesigned quarterly reports is targeted for October 2009.</p> <p>Redevelopment of the quarterly report process is a key component of the Advocate's 2009-12 Business Plan.</p> <p>The reports will be made publicly available.</p>
<p>3. An expert advisory panel of youth and other key stakeholders should be utilized to facilitate more transparent and comprehensive identification and validation of systemic issues and actions.</p>	Accepted	<p>The establishment of an expert advisory panel is a key goal in the Advocate's 2009-12 Business Plan. It is anticipated that the panel will be in place by March 2010.</p>
<p>4. The Advocate should proactively collaborate with the ministry to enhance and foster working relationships with Aboriginal stakeholders, including but not limited to delegated First Nation</p>	Accepted	<p>The Advocate and the ministry will continue to work together to establish effective working relationships with Aboriginal communities that contribute to the identification and resolution of systemic and service issues for children</p>

<p>agencies (DFNAs), Métis, and First Nations communities.</p>		<p>and youth.</p> <p>This will include joint meetings and strategy discussions with Aboriginal stakeholders and communities.</p> <p>This is identified as a long-term goal in the Advocate's 2009-12 Business Plan.</p>
<p>5. The relationship between the Advocate and service providers, such as foster parents, contracted agencies, and child and family services authority (CFSA)/ DFNA staff should be enhanced to identify and develop strategic alliances for change that will benefit children and youth.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate will enhance efforts to develop alliances with service providers and organizations that will assist and support efforts to resolve systemic and service issues that affect children and youth.</p> <p>This is identified as a long-term goal in the Advocate's 2009-12 Business Plan.</p>
<p>6. The Advocate, together with the ministry, CFSAs, and DFNAs should strengthen the processes for dispute resolution available to children and youth receiving child welfare services.</p> <p>The processes should seek to optimize natural or community and professional advocacy options.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate will work collaboratively to assist the department, CFSAs, and DFNAs in strengthening dispute resolution processes available to children and youth in their communities.</p>
<p>7. The Advocate should enhance the office's management system to better link business planning and reporting with child and youth outcomes. These linkages should be shared with the ministry and service providers.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate and ministry will work collaboratively to incorporate business objectives and reporting of initiatives contributing to child and youth outcomes in the Ministry Business Plan.</p>
<p>8. Alberta's system for child and youth advocacy should reflect four core functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide individual advocacy. b. Identify and address systemic challenges. c. Optimize professional advocacy. d. Enhance natural or community advocacy. <p>The Advocate should work with other stakeholders in the child welfare system to address each of these functions.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate will continue to provide individual advocacy and identify systemic issues as core activities of the office.</p> <p>The Advocate will also develop educational opportunities for communities to establish advocacy supports for children and youth and will develop educational and developmental programs for professionals involved with children and youth.</p> <p>These activities are included in the Advocate's business plan to be developed and implemented over the next three years.</p>

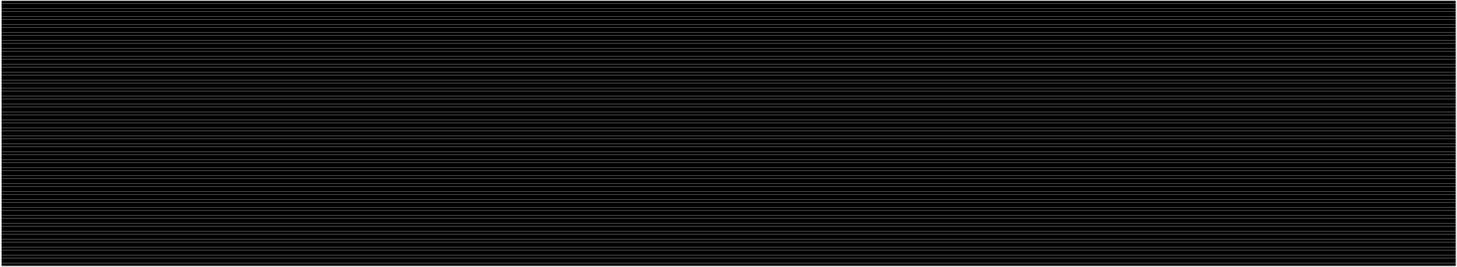
<p>9. The Minister and Advocate should develop a detailed memorandum of understanding that formalizes roles and responsibilities of the Minister, ministry, and Advocate.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate will continue discussions with the ministry started last fall to collaboratively establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Advocate, ministry, and Minister.</p> <p>This MOU is targeted for completion by October 2009 and will be made publicly available.</p>
<p>10. The Advocate should review its operational processes, competencies, and structure to ensure alignment with changes that may occur as a result of implementation of the report recommendations.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The Advocate will implement a planned organizational review of the office in 2009-10.</p> <p>This review is a core business objective in the Advocate's 2009 -12 Business Plan.</p>

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Advocacy system review committee members

Mark Hattori, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Chair of the Review Committee

Program Quality and Standards Division, Alberta Children and Youth Services

Mark Hattori was appointed to his current role of acting assistant deputy minister in November 2008.

He has more than 20 years of experience in the field of child and family services.

He has worked in a variety of positions in the provincial child and family services system, including as chief executive officer of the Diamond Willow and Central Alberta CFSAs.

Mr. Hattori holds a degree in social work from the University of Calgary.

Bruce Rivers, Chief Executive Officer, Community Living Toronto

Past President, Child Welfare League of Canada / International Forum for Child Welfare

Bruce Rivers has served approximately two years as chief executive officer for Community Living Toronto,

and previously served nearly two decades as executive director of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

He also helped lead a major policy reform to improve outcomes and sustainability of the child welfare system as executive director of the Child Welfare Secretariat of Ontario's Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Rivers is past president of the Child Welfare League of Canada and International Forum for Child Welfare. He holds a bachelor of arts degree and a master's of social work degree and is a sessional instructor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto.

Bruce MacLaurin, Assistant Professor

Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Bruce MacLaurin is an assistant professor in the social work faculty at the University of Calgary.

His research and published works have focused on using research to inform policy and practice related to child maltreatment, child welfare policy and delivery, foster care outcomes, and street youth and youth at risk.

Mr. MacLaurin has more than 15 years of experience in the children's services sector in Alberta and Ontario.

He holds several degrees including a master's degree in social work from the University of Calgary.

Loiselle Arcand, Designate

Alexander First Nation

Loiselle Arcand is a registered social worker and manager of community services for Alexander First Nation. As designate, she serves as liaison between the band and the child and family services authority when the authority provides services to children and families on

the First Nation.

Ms. Arcand started working in her community as a youth and family support worker in 1988. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Calgary.

Stephen Clarke, Youth Representative

Mr. Clarke is a post-secondary student studying cultural anthropology and archaeology at Red Deer College.

As a former foster child, he has extensive knowledge and experience with the child intervention system.

Mr. Clarke served two years as a member of the youth advisory panel for Children and Youth Services. He has also been involved in other youth initiatives in the province.

Cortney Garnett, Youth Representative

Cortney Garnett first became involved with the child intervention system in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Garnett was 16 years old when she decided to leave that province and relocate to Edmonton.

She completed high school and is now a part-time student at Mount Royal College.

Ms. Garnett has been involved in a number of youth initiatives over the past four years, including the World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence and Children and Youth Services Youth Advisory Panel. She has also delivered workshops at a child and youth forum and a world forum on child welfare.

Phil Goodman, Senior Policy Advisor

Alberta Children and Youth Services

Phil Goodman has significant experience in the area of child and family services provision in western Canada. Prior to recently accepting a senior policy advisor mentoring and knowledge transfer position with the ministry, he was the assistant deputy minister of the Program Quality and Standards Division.

Mr. Goodman also worked for several years for the provincial government and agencies in Manitoba (Manitoba Family Services, Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, Manitoba Foster Parents' Association). He is nationally and internationally recognized for his experience and knowledge of the child welfare system.

Mr. Goodman holds bachelor of social work and arts degrees from the University of Manitoba.

Bonnie Johnston, Chief Executive Officer

Calgary & Area Child and Family Services Authority

Bonnie Johnston began her career as a nurse in an aboriginal community in the northern part of Alberta and later served in a variety of roles in the health care field in Edmonton and Calgary.

Prior to her appointment as chief executive officer for the child and family services authority in Calgary in 2002, she was the director of child and adolescent health for the Calgary Health Region.

Ms. Johnston holds a master's degree in health services administration and a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Calgary.

Susan Wismer, LLB, PGDip (Law), Director

Legal Services, Alberta Children and Youth Services

Susan Wismer has 26 years of legal experience in both private practice and the public service. She previously held senior legal positions with the ministries of Advanced Education and Justice.

Ms. Wismer was extensively involved in the development and implementation of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, the *Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act*, and the *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*.

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