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**Nov. 18, 2019**  
**For Immediate Release**

We are currently in the midst of Transgender Awareness Week (Nov. 12-19), a time dedicated annually to raising awareness and visibility of transgender, two-spirit and gender-diverse people and the issues they face around transition and identity.

As an ally of all children and youth in British Columbia, my Office is proud to celebrate Transgender Awareness Week and to also mark the International Transgender Day of Remembrance on Nov. 20. This specific day memorializes the victims of transphobic violence suffered by far too many world-wide.

It is deeply concerning to me that, at the RCY, we are observing an increase in the number of injury reports we receive that have been experienced by gender-diverse children and youth who have come into contact with the child-serving system. Our RCY Advocates are also noticing an increase in requests from gender-diverse youth who are struggling to have their identities respected and supported by caregivers. Some of these young people have shared that they experience a lack of safety in their own homes.

This anecdotal evidence reflects the results of the 2019 Trans Youth Health Survey, the first of its kind in Canada, which found that nearly two-thirds of youth surveyed reported self-harming during the past year and a similar number reported having serious thoughts of suicide. More than one-third of those surveyed had attempted suicide and more than one-quarter reported that they had run away from home in the past year. (You can find the survey here: [https://saravyc.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/05/SARAVYC\\_Trans-Youth-Health-Report\\_EN\\_Final\\_Web2.pdf](https://saravyc.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2015/05/SARAVYC_Trans-Youth-Health-Report_EN_Final_Web2.pdf))

All of this aligns with what we know from other existing research – that many transgender and gender-diverse people face significant mental health and social challenges.

All child-serving systems in our province need to be prepared to recognize and affirm gender identities. I commend the B.C. Ministry of Education for its unwavering commitment to creating gender-inclusive schools through SOGI 123 resources, which incorporate content on gender diversity that can be used across the curriculum.

The child-serving system has significant work to do to ensure gender-diverse children, youth and families are appropriately supported. I believe child-serving systems, including the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), must make improvements to their intake systems so that gender-diverse children can be identified for the purpose of supporting them and caring for them in the best possible way.

As a start, I call on MCFD to develop and implement policy on gender-affirming practice that sets the expectation that every child will have their gender identity, gender expression, chosen name and pronouns respected and affirmed.

In order to support consistency of practice, changes are required around the way information about gender is collected and recorded. This includes adjusting forms to reflect gender diversity, as well as ensuring that children and youth are invited into ongoing conversations about their gender identity that allows for gender fluidity.

Gender-diverse children and youth need allies at home, at school and in all areas of their lives to help ensure their rights are respected. All children and youth deserve to feel safe, seen and valued for who they are – during this week and every week of the year.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth  
Representative for Children and Youth