



Statement

Sept. 1, 2017

For Immediate Release

Today's announcement by the Premier and Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training – expanding tuition waivers for former children and youth in care to all 25 post-secondary institutions in British Columbia – is a positive step by government.

At the urging of my predecessor, a number of B.C. institutions have been offering tuition waivers to former children and youth in care for the past few years and I am pleased to see government now making this a universal program across the province. It will have a significant impact on the lives of some of our most vulnerable children and youth.

Most of us know that children and youth who spend time in care are often at a disadvantage in life. Many are overcoming traumatic experiences and many don't have the support of family to help them move into the adult world. This Office has long advocated for better supports for those who age out of care and expanding tuition waivers to all universities and colleges in B.C. is indeed a laudable move in that direction.

Nevertheless, I do have concern about the age limit established for this program that caps eligibility at 26. As Representative, I have strongly advocated for free tuition being granted to former youth in care into their 30s and I will continue to do so.

Many of these youth need more time as adults before they are ready to tackle the challenges of post-secondary education. My Office expects that 20 per cent or more of former youth in care who will be seeking tuition waivers will be over the age of 26. I am concerned that the age cap as introduced today could prohibit such students from taking advantage of this program.

My other concern with this announcement is that youth will be required to have spent at least two years in care in order to receive tuition waivers. There is a risk that this limitation will also exclude some former youth in care who were previously eligible for tuition waivers at schools offering them.

I do note that government has pledged to consider exceptions to its eligibility criteria on a case-by-case basis. My Office will be watching this closely. My understanding is government will also immediately begin to assess the program as it rolls out this month, and I will continue to strongly advocate for changes during that period.

Bernard Richard

B.C. Representative for Children and Youth