



News Release

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CHILD DEATH INVESTIGATION SHOWS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIXES CALLED FOR TWO YEARS AGO ARE STILL NEEDED, SAYS REPRESENTATIVE

VICTORIA – More than two years after the release of a major report calling for a more coordinated system to protect B.C. children living with domestic violence, the Representative's most recent child death investigation shows that only tweaks have been done.

"It is alarming and frustrating, in releasing today's report focused on Kaitlynn, Cordon and Max, to not be able to point to significant improvements since we released our *Honouring Christian Lee* report in 2009," said Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth.

"Instead, today we still see unaddressed disconnects between systems that so urgently need to be working closely together in domestic violence situations – child protection, income assistance, mental health, police and judicial systems."

Kaitlynn, Max and Cordon were killed by their father, Allan Schoenborn, in April 2008. They were 10, 8 and 5 when they died. During their short lives, they lived with upheaval and anxiety caused by domestic violence, and their father's untreated mental illness and addictions.

In the week leading up to the children's deaths, Schoenborn was arrested three times. In that same week before their deaths, 14 professionals were involved with this family.

The Representative's in-depth investigation into the children's lives and deaths resulted in the report released today, *Honouring Kaitlynn, Max and Cordon: Make Their Voices Heard Now*.

"The loss of these children is heartbreaking, and even more so because they were preventable deaths. Appropriate actions were not taken by professionals, over a period of several years and in two different communities," said Turpel-Lafond. "If the social safety net made up of child protection, income assistance, justice and mental health supports had worked appropriately and in partnership, there is a high likelihood that the deaths of these three children would have been avoided."

The investigation also clearly showed that the nature and extent of the father's mental illness was left unaddressed, even though it was identified as a significant issue when MCFD first had contact with the family in 1999. On the few occasions that Schoenborn was involved with mental health services, support workers and professionals involved with the family appeared blind to the risk for these children.

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Gaps and shortcomings in the mental health system, and the lack of follow-up contributed to a failure to protect these vulnerable children and their struggling mother, said Turpel-Lafond.

A key recommendation in the report is that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development take immediate steps to ensure that staff and professionals connected to their systems understand the risk factors relating to children of parents with a serious untreated mental illness. The recommendation identifies four crucial actions essential to promote the well-being of children.

The other main recommendation is that the B.C. government must demonstrate a renewed and serious commitment to protect children living with domestic violence, and provide a comprehensive plan for this by September 2012. The recommendation urges closing gaps in policies and practices across government that touch the lives of children, including child welfare, adult mental health, criminal and family justice systems, police, victim services, education and income assistance.

Six additional recommendations are directed at four ministries regarding issues that need to be addressed without delay so that B.C. children are better protected today and in the future.

“Countless opportunities to ensure that the children and their mother were safe were missed. Today, almost four years after the deaths of these three children, a collaborative, systemic approach to complex cases across B.C.’s child-serving, mental health, and criminal and civil justice systems still does not exist,” Turpel-Lafond said. “More work and much change are urgently required to help protect other children and families living in similar situations today from injury and death.”

Turpel-Lafond said that government needs to act without delay to assist workers and professionals supporting children and families in the grip of domestic violence and untreated parental mental health. Clear direction and adequate resources for workers, along with rigorous evaluation as to whether improvements have been implemented and are effective are needed, she said.

“What is still required today is dedicated senior leadership to coordinate, monitor, evaluate and champion the much-needed changes to the system of services across government,” said Turpel-Lafond. “The legacy of Kaitlynne, Max and Cordon must not be their senseless and violent deaths, but that other B.C. children are better protected in the future.”

Note: The Representative strongly urges media to respect the privacy of the children’s mother. She is enduring the devastating loss of all of her children, and she participated in this difficult investigation to help ensure a better child-serving system in the future. In appreciation for her participation, and out of respect for her grief, the Representative requests that her right to privacy be respected.

Note: The full report, *Honouring Kaitlynne, Max and Cordon: Make Their Voices Heard Now*, is available on the Representative’s website (www.rcybc.ca)

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