



News Release

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REPRESENTATIVE AND MINISTER ALIGN ON ADOPTION

VICTORIA – Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and Minister of Children and Family Development Stephanie Cadieux today announced a joint commitment to dramatically increase adoption rates for children in the province’s care.

“Right now, at any given time, there are 1,000 children in B.C. government care waiting to be adopted,” Turpel-Lafond said. “Some of them wait for years; some are never adopted. B.C. can do better than this, and I’m very pleased to join Minister Cadieux in taking this important step toward improving the lives of some of our most vulnerable young people.”

“Promoting adoption is of particular interest to me and the ministry has recently been focusing efforts in this area,” said Minister Cadieux. “Working with the Representative underscores how important adoption is to those of us who work to ensure the safety and well-being of children which is why the Premier, as part of my mandate letter, is requiring I present options to cabinet that will strengthen the provincial adoption program.”

The joint commitment is underpinned by Turpel-Lafond’s release of *Finding Forever Families: A Review of the Provincial Adoption System*, a report that recommends six steps to assist the province in improving its adoption and permanency planning outcomes, which the ministry commits to working on.

Recommendations include:

1. That the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) administer its permanency planning and adoptions services as a central, provincial program under the authority of the Director of Child Welfare, thereby eliminating the ministry’s current practice of regional decision-making and diffused responsibility.
2. That MCFD work with stakeholders to implement an on-going, high-profile provincial adoption awareness campaign and recruitment strategy to increase the number of adoptions of children in care.
3. That MCFD make legislative changes to require and support external oversight and public reporting of adoption or alternative permanency plans on an annual basis.
4. That MCFD, in immediate partnership with First Nations and Aboriginal communities, including delegated Aboriginal Agencies, take specific measures to improve rates of adoption and other permanency planning for Aboriginal children in care.
5. That MCFD develop and implement a quality assurance program for adoptions that reviews, assesses and monitors adoption practice and outcomes for children in care,

including service quality and outcomes for prospective and approved adoptive families.

6. That MCFD develop key performance measures and targets to track timely permanency, including adoption placements, for children in care and timely approvals for prospective adoptive parents.

“Considering the vast over-representation of Aboriginal children among B.C.’s in-care population, we must find ways to encourage adoptive First Nations families to step forward,” Turpel-Lafond said. “I appeal to the leadership of B.C.’s First Nations communities to help this generation avoid what has greatly harmed past generations – the removal of children from their communities and their culture.”

“We understand the sensitivities that many Aboriginal communities have with adoption,” said Cadieux, “and we are committed to working with each community on finding the best path forward to providing safe homes for their children.”

Consistent with the recommendations, the province’s recent investment of \$2 million aimed at increasing the number of adoption placements to 300 and the number of transfer of guardianship placements to 144 by March 31, 2015. Ten adoption agencies across the province received funding to achieve the ministry’s goal of increased permanency through adoption and guardianship placements for children and youth in care.

More than 1,300 B.C. children in government care were eligible for adoption in 2012/13, with 205 adoption placements during that time period. Over a six-year period beginning in 2007, overall annual adoption placements by MCFD declined by more than one-third. Meanwhile, the number of newly approved adoptive homes has also fallen, from a high of 386 in 2005/06 to 213 in 2012/13.

“Our message today to British Columbians is: If you are able to provide a ‘forever family’ to one of these children and youth, please apply,” Turpel-Lafond said. “Many of these kids haven’t had a positive start in life and it’s critical that they be provided with the security and opportunity for growth that a permanent, nurturing family can bring.”

“Every child deserves a place to come home to that is safe and a family they can count on being there throughout their life,” said Cadieux. “By harnessing the powers and profile of the ministry and the Representative’s office, we have a chance to make a real difference in the number of adoptions finalized in B.C. each year.”

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BACKGROUNDER

Further report details include:

In a study group tracked over a six-year period for the Representative's report, only 260 of 450 children were adopted and only 197 of 457 prospective families completed an adoption. Ministry adoption workers interviewed for the report identified a number of issues that cause bottlenecks in the system including an inadequate focus and priority on adoptions in recent years, lack of proper training and lack of workers dedicated to adoptions. The report concludes that adoption practice has varied from region to region and that the ministry has not run a provincial adoption awareness and recruitment campaign for 10 years.

One of the report's key recommendations is that government work in partnership with First Nations and Aboriginal organizations and communities to take specific measures to improve rates of adoption and other permanency planning for Aboriginal children in care. Although Aboriginal children comprised more than 63 per cent of the children in MCFD's continuing care in 2012/13, they accounted for less than 35 per cent of the children placed in adoptive homes that year.

The Representative is also recommending an annual review by B.C.'s Provincial Court of all actions taken by MCFD to realize adoption or other permanency measures for each child under a Continuing Custody Order. The report calls for MCFD's permanency planning and adoptions services to be operated as a central, provincial program to achieve consistency in services across B.C. It also calls for adequate resources, appropriate performance targets and quality assurance controls for adoption, as well as a high-profile, on-going campaign to raise adoption awareness and recruit adoptive families in B.C.