

NEWS RELEASE

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**BC Children and Youth Review
Hon. Ted Hughes, OC, QC, LL.D. (Hon.)**

HUGHES CALLS FOR STABILITY IN B.C. CHILD PROTECTION

VICTORIA – Upheavals to a child protection system that has been stretched far beyond its limits must stop, the Hon. Ted Hughes said today in publicly releasing the final report from his independent B.C. Children and Youth Review.

“My strongest impression from this review is one of a child welfare system buffeted by an unmanageable degree of change,” Hughes said. “The need for equilibrium and stability is a central theme of my report.

“In the best interests of our province’s most precious assets -- our children and youth -- I call upon all members of B.C.’s government to move towards substantial compliance with the recommendations in my report.”

A revolving door in senior leadership positions, major shifts in practice, functions, and processes, and significant funding cuts have created a climate of instability and confusion that has only detracted from the Ministry of Children and Families’ work on behalf of children, Hughes said.

Hughes is calling for the appointment of a new, independent body to oversee the child welfare system. The Representative for Children and Youth would be appointed as an Officer of the Legislature for a five-year term, and report to an all-party Standing Committee.

“I encourage the introduction of legislation this fall to enable the timely appointment of the Representative for Children and Youth, who can begin addressing some of the very real challenges facing the province,” Hughes said.

The Representative would have the authority to advocate for individual children and families, advocate for systemic change, monitor and report on the child welfare system, and review child injuries and deaths. The focus would be more on examining patterns and trends of injuries and deaths in the child welfare system, and less on individual child death reviews, to continuously learn and improve policies, practices and services to children and youth.

Hughes’ report also highlights the unique situation of Aboriginal children and families in B.C.’s child protection system.

“I am disheartened by the rate of suicide among young Aboriginal people and the ever-increasing numbers of Aboriginal children being taken into care,” Hughes said. “Immediate measures are recommended to strengthen current Aboriginal delegated agencies, so that they are able to carry out their child welfare responsibilities as effectively as possible.”

The needs are simple but acute, such as office management systems and skills, computer equipment and Internet access to track cases and communicate quickly with other agencies. As well, access to the same training opportunities provided to Ministry staff, and to special training directed to their particular needs, is essential, he said.

“We have an opportunity now to build on commitments made in the Kelowna Accord, and its focus on housing, education, health and economic opportunity,” Hughes said. “We are in a better position than ever to close the gap in the quality of life enjoyed by Aboriginal people and other British Columbians, and start reversing conditions that cause so many Aboriginal children to need protection.”

The Hughes report also includes an examination of the transfer of the child death review function and related child death files when the Children’s Commission office was closed in 2002.

“We’ve done a thorough review of these files and I’m satisfied with the current status of the Coroners Service review of the transition files,” Hughes said, adding that Coroner’s investigations are now complete on two-thirds of the files. The Coroner intends to have all reviews completed by September 2006.

During the Hughes review, 955 files were identified, located, and inspected. That includes 249 files that were not included in the Ministry’s original count because Coroners reviews on them were already complete at the time the Hughes process began.

Recommendations include having the new Representative for Children and Youth prepare a special report examining information relating to the files of those children who had been in care or receiving ministry services.

Hughes, appointed in November 2005 to carry out his child protection review, said he believes the B.C. Children and Youth Review report and its 62 recommendations form a blueprint for full repair of a system caring for the province’s most vulnerable children and families.

Highlight sheet attached.

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