



News Release

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***CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE* CALLS FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO WAY “INTERPROVINCIAL CHILDREN” ARE SERVED**

Key improvements are required both within British Columbia and at the national level to ensure that vulnerable children who move between provinces and territories are kept safe and receive appropriate services, recommends a report released today by B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth.

Caught in the Middle is an investigative report examining the factors that led to the overdose death of a 17-year-old boy with complex needs who spent time in the child-serving systems of both B.C. and Alberta and was moved more than 40 times while in government care.

The report recommends that B.C.’s Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) take a leadership role in bringing about changes to the Interprovincial Protocol that guides the provision of services and supports to children moving between provinces and territories. It also recommends that MCFD strengthen its own oversight of such “interprovincial children” to ensure they receive timely and suitable services.

Romain, a pseudonym used to protect confidentiality, died in May 2017 while placed in an emergency staffed residential resource in B.C. The RCY report found a direct link between the inadequate services he and his family received in B.C. and his death, as Romain was essentially caught in the middle of poor communication and coordination between the two provinces regarding his care.

“This boy and his family deserved much, much better,” said Representative Jennifer Charlesworth. “It’s time that the Interprovincial Protocol was strengthened and MCFD must improve its own oversight and handling of these cases so that this doesn’t happen to other children and families.”

The Representative’s mandate does not include the ability to make findings about services provided by Alberta Child Services. However, the report points out that the Alberta ministry failed to provide sufficient notice or follow the Interprovincial Protocol on the three occasions it placed Romain in B.C. Once Romain had been placed in B.C., miscommunication between

the provincial ministries led to him not being properly supported to live with family. After family placements had broken down and it became apparent that Romain needed a specialized resource to be created for him, the ministries didn't work together to make that happen.

“The best interests of Romain were not fully considered and acted upon,” Charlesworth said. “and the result was as predictable as it was tragic.”

The Representative makes six recommendations in this report, including calling for MCFD to push for improvements to the Interprovincial Protocol when it is next reviewed by provincial and territorial Directors of Child Welfare in 2021. Those improvements should include the addition of cultural planning, clarification about the delegation of guardianship responsibilities and how disputes can be resolved when children arrive in a province or territory without notice, and an amendment to Interprovincial Agreement forms to include details on financial expenditures and payment mechanisms.

The Representative also recommends that MCFD fully dedicate an Interprovincial Coordinator to work together with an adequately resourced network of regional practice consultants to support, track and monitor interprovincial cases – both those involving children who arrive in this province and those who move from B.C. to other provinces and territories. In order to improve how MCFD deals with such cases, the Representative recommends that the ministry create provincial practice guidelines or policies and develop a mandatory online training course for staff specific to these cases.

With regard to the cultural planning that might have helped Romain, the Representative recommends that MCFD direct its staff to speak with all children in care about their ethnicity and desired connections to their culture and to record that self-identified ethnicity in the ministry's case management system.

Two other recommendations address current and well-known shortcomings in B.C.'s system of services to care for children and youth who have experienced trauma. The Representative recommends that MCFD ensure a trauma-informed method is implemented for making decisions about resourcing for the children in its care who have experienced multiple adversities. She also calls on MCFD to assess the need for residential care and treatment resources across the province to accommodate children with complex needs and to create sufficient resources to meet those assessed needs in a timely way.

You can find the full report here: www.rcybc.ca/caughtinthemiddle

The Representative will present this report to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth on Nov. 27.

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