



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New report finds excessive workloads preventing B.C. social workers from properly caring for province's most vulnerable young people.**

**VICTORIA** – A new report issued today by the Representative for Children and Youth finds that over 80 percent of social workers working in the child welfare system say they are unable to properly do their jobs because their caseloads with the Ministry of Children and Development are too high.

“Social workers in this province have incredibly difficult jobs and to see how understaffed and overworked they are is truly disturbing,” said Representative Jennifer Charlesworth. “We have known about chronic understaffing at this ministry for decades, yet successive governments have not addressed these challenges. Now, here we are yet again, reeling from the death of a child that was entirely preventable.”

Charlesworth's report today comes in the wake of her report released last week *Don't Look Away*, which detailed the death of a boy the report named “Colby”. Colby was tortured and killed at the hands of family caregivers in 2021. The report highlighted a number of instances of lack of compliance with child protection policies and practice and noted that understaffing, a lack of backfill for extended medical leave, unstable local leadership and confusion about roles and responsibilities in relation to the local First Nation may have been contributing factors.

Charlesworth's latest report titled, *No Time to Wait* relies on more than 700 responses from an extensive survey of social workers, and their team leaders and managers, that was conducted by the Representative's office in April and May of this year, together with the results of focus groups of social workers, community engagement sessions, a review of relevant literature and previous reports, and analysis of ministry documentation and data. As well as highlighting severe workload pressures, the report also finds that 77 percent of social workers say they don't have timely access to necessary family and community supports to help the children and families they are working with and 90 percent of social workers report having very high stress levels. Sick leave and exit rates among MCFD staff are much higher than the BC Public Service average. The report also notes that previous audits obtained by the Representative's office show consistently low compliance by social workers with a wide range of provincial practice standards due to excessive workload. The report notes that in order to achieve 85 percent compliance with these standards, the ministry's previous workload analysis

measurement tool, which was abandoned in 2021, found that the ministry would need to hire several hundred additional social workers, which hasn't happened.

"What we see here is a situation where social workers are often unable to provide the responsive and thorough support that children and their families need. This puts young people at risk," said Charlesworth. "While adding staff is obviously a critical priority, that is not the only solution – the ministry needs to take steps to make it a healthier and more supportive organization so prospective staff are attracted to working there and current staff want to stay working there. Our kids deserve no less," said Charlesworth.

This is the first of a two-part report, with the second more comprehensive report expected in late fall 2024. The circumstances are, however, so urgent says the Representative, that there is no time to wait until that final report and she is urging the ministry to start taking a number of immediate steps now, including that the ministry:

- develop and implement a social worker workload measurement tool to determine required staffing levels, publicly posting the required and actual staffing levels at the provincial, service delivery area and local service area levels at least annually.
- that government ensure funding is available to staff up to the levels indicated by the workload measurement tool.
- in consultation with the BCGEU, implement more robust compensation incentives to better support the recruitment and retention of child welfare social workers.
- enhance training and clinical and case management support for social workers in relation to working with Indigenous children, families and communities.
- develop and implement a robust plan to better support the health and wellness of child welfare staff and mitigate the effects of stress, vicarious trauma and burnout by implementing a comprehensive and proactive system of debriefing, peer-to-peer, counselling and mental health supports
- publicly commit to refrain from direct or indirect criticism or blaming of child welfare social workers in circumstances where are known systemic inadequacies.

"These are practical steps that I expect the ministry to take now," said Charlesworth. "This is a vital workforce that has not had the focused attention it requires for too long. I am expecting that the clear and urgent calls social workers are making, will finally be heard."

### **To View the Report:**

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