

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 15, 2025

**B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth renews call for tangible, on-the-ground changes to ensure child well-being**

**Victoria** – One year after the high-profile report focusing on the preventable death of an 11-year-old boy in the Fraser Valley, B.C.'s independent oversight office for children and youth says more must be done to ensure young people are safe and supported to thrive in the province.

July 16, 2025, marks the one-year anniversary of the release of [\*Don't Look Away – How one boy's story has the power to shift a system of care for children and youth\*](#), issued by B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth. It shares the story of "Colby" and his family, and the many ways in which various systems of care let them down. It also describes the circumstances and missteps that led to his horrific torture and death in 2021 at the hands of extended family caregivers, while in the care of the provincial government.

"One of the most heart-breaking findings of this report was that this beautiful child's many critical injuries and his death could have been prevented," said Charlesworth. "I want to acknowledge the incomprehensible grief and loss that this child's family, those who loved him, and the communities he was connected to continue to experience. I want to be able to tell them that we have learned and that things are better for children and families in B.C., but I need to see more change on the ground before I am able to do that."

The report includes a systemic review of key themes that were prevalent in Colby's life, and the lives of many young people who have been injured or died while receiving government services. A central experience of the young people in the report is the prevalence of violence in their lives, and the intergenerational presence of violence in their families' lives. "Ending the silence on violence and building our collective capacity to effectively respond to intimate partner and family violence when it occurs, and then helping families and communities heal, is critical," said Charlesworth. Other systemic issues addressed in the report include lack of family support



to prevent or mitigate crises and protection concerns, inequitable supports for extended family caregiving arrangements, significant weaknesses in interagency collaboration and communication, and the risks of confusion over responsibilities as Nations transition to having jurisdiction over their own child welfare systems.

The *Don't Look Away* report lays a blueprint for a new path forward for fixing what Charlesworth describes as an “outdated, siloed, discriminatory” child welfare system that requires “a complete overhaul.”

“When we released our report, then Minister of Children and Family Development Minister Grace Lore spoke on behalf of government and sincerely and humbly declared her and the government’s commitment to fulfilling the vision and accepting all recommendations presented in *Don't Look Away*,” said Charlesworth. “While some important changes have been made and the commitment remains, we must all work harder to ensure that we do not turn away from children, youth and families especially at this challenging time in history.”

Charlesworth says Colby’s story illuminated the intensifying urgency that surrounds young people and their families currently as they face pressure on numerous fronts including affordability, housing, mental health, and the impacts of the escalating toxic drug crisis. “The pressures that families are experiencing now are having a direct and profound impact on child well-being,” said Charlesworth. “I know government joins me in being deeply concerned about our young people and has good intentions, but I am very concerned that with fiscal limitations these good intentions will not translate into timely on-the-ground improvements for young people and their families,” said Charlesworth.

Charlesworth says her top priority of *Don't Look Away* is to shift government away from a child welfare system focused on child protection to a new “North Star” that focuses on supporting the well-being of young people holistically. “Thirty years of reports have been telling us that we urgently need to shift our system. Today we are closer to that transformational vision, but we must continue the momentum.”

Charlesworth notes key areas of positive government progress related to her recommendations including:

- Government immediately acted to establish a governance and accountability structure across ministries and has made progress towards a cross-government child well-being strategy and action plan.

- All ministries that support children and families have assessed work underway that can be expedited and expanded immediately while working towards the longer-term vision and transformation.
- The Ministry of Children and Family Development has renewed its commitment to First Nations to support self-determination and restoration of jurisdiction over their children's welfare.
- New training has been delivered to over 800 child welfare workers to ensure that they are better prepared to work with Nations who are resuming jurisdiction over child and family services.
- Over 90 percent of young people are now being seen within 90 days as per Ministry of Children and Family Development policy. Information is collected and monitored in real time.
- Ministries are working together to establish an outcomes-based framework to measure child and youth well-being and ensure that investments are directed towards solutions that make a positive difference.

Areas that Charlesworth points to as needing more attention and action include:

- Family support – While government is committed to enhancing preventive, services more must be done to support families – including basic income and housing support.
- Violence – More needs to be done to centre the needs of young people in ongoing violence prevention work at the provincial level.
- Extended family caregivers must receive adequate resources to support their success.
- Staffing - Despite government's considerable efforts to fill child welfare workforce vacancies across the province, demands outstrip the current workforce capacity in many child-serving roles.
- Collaboration – Thus far, government has been working internally and has not done enough to tap into the knowledge, wisdom and creativity of Nations, other sectors and community services to find better ways to support children, youth and families.

"These are challenging times. Government has good intentions and is making progress, but we know from past experience that many reports end up sitting on the shelf. We owe it to Colby to not look away. All of us have a role to play to support young people. We must act for kids now if we want to see our province thrive in the future," said Charlesworth.

Media contact – Sara Darling 778 679 2588