

Advocate for Children and Youth Tables 2015 Annual Report

SASKATOON – Bob Pringle, the Advocate for Children and Youth, tabled his sixth *Annual Report* in the Legislative Assembly today. In it, the Advocate reflects on developments in 2015 and makes some observations and recommendations on the rights, interests and well-being of Saskatchewan children and youth.

The Report takes a thematic, issue-based approach to the rights of children and youth. Topics covered include out-of-home care, youth in custody, gaps in mental health access and services, the need for trauma-informed human services, and the ongoing challenges facing First Nations and Métis children and youth in this province. Also highlighted are the ‘calls to action’ toward reconciliation from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

“There have been some significant improvements in the child welfare system in Saskatchewan over the last half-decade,” Pringle said, “including improved decision-making processes, more safe placements of children with extended family, and continuing delegation of control to First Nation child welfare agencies.” However, many longstanding issues remain, from high levels of child poverty to a lack of attention to the needs of youth aging out of care.

Against this backdrop, the Advocate calls on the province to better measure and monitor child well-being in Saskatchewan. “We need a comprehensive framework to advance and track child well-being,” he noted. “We all share in the benefits when children thrive. And for this to happen we need to significantly increase our investments in early childhood development, pre-kindergarten, family resource centres, intensive family supports, childcare, Early Childhood Intervention Programs, KidsFirst and so on.”

On the matter of youth transitioning from permanent care as wards of the province, Pringle noted that “few parents today mark their son or daughter’s 18th birthday by walking them to the front door, wishing them well, and sending them on their way into the world without support. Like a good parent, the Ministry of Social Services needs to support youth transitioning from permanent care as needed well beyond 18, and up to age 25 at least.”

In the youth justice sector, the closure of two open-custody facilities and the transfer of open-custody youth to existing closed-custody facilities is highlighted. The Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing, made this change without consultation and in spite of a major facility review that called for substantial facility and program upgrades before making such a move.

The Advocate aims to prevent and reduce injuries and deaths of children and youth by providing advocacy services on their behalf, investigating critical injuries and deaths, making formal recommendations to improve services, and speaking to situations that put children and youth at risk. Throughout his tenure, Pringle has focused on improving outcomes for children and youth, and the need to address the factors that put them at risk – poverty and its related conditions, mental illness, violence, addictions, racism, the legacy of colonialism and residential schools, and disabilities.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of advocates, investigators and other staff who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy, programs and practice.

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For the 2015 Annual Report, please visit: www.saskadvocate.ca.

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