

**Advocate for Children and Youth comments on the release of the
Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy**

SASKATOON – Social Services Minister Donna Harpauer issued a long-awaited response to the recommendations of the Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction on February 24, 2016. Bob Pringle, Saskatchewan’s Advocate for Children and Youth, welcomes the province’s stated goal of reducing persistent poverty in the province by half by 2025. However, he is concerned that the actions contemplated in the province’s response fall well short of a comprehensive and substantive strategy to meaningfully reduce poverty.

“I would like to once again convey my appreciation to the Advisory Group for their thoughtful work on this important issue,” Pringle said. “I would also like to thank the province for initiating this review and for providing this response to the Advisory Group’s recommendations.”

In their August 2015 report, the Advisory Group made recommendations in six priority areas: income security; housing and homelessness; early childhood development; education and training; employment; and health and food security. The proposed Provincial Strategy retains and reworks these priority areas by combining those on education and employment and adding one on vulnerable families and individuals.

“This is a welcome innovation,” Pringle said, “as it draws attention to the urgent need to address interpersonal and family violence in our province, a topic that was largely overlooked in the Advisory Group’s initial recommendations.” He is also pleased that the proposed strategy contemplates several actions that improve transitional supports for at-risk youth and youth in care, and extend the age of eligibility for wards of the province to receive support for continued education.

The Advocate for Children and Youth has been calling on the provincial government to develop and implement well-resourced early childhood development and poverty reduction strategies for some time, including making a formal recommendation in *Two Tragedies: Holding Systems Accountable*, his May 2014 report into the death of a child in foster care.

Pringle is pleased that a comprehensive Early Years Plan continues to be a priority action area in the Provincial Strategy. That said, he is disappointed that its proposed actions are often vague and without specifics or timelines. Pringle is also troubled by the absence of details on short- and medium-term actions to implement three major public policy agendas that have been awkwardly tagged on to this one – the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan, the Provincial Disability Strategy, and the Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nation and Métis People.

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.

“I am looking forward to learning more about the provincial government’s strategy to reduce poverty,” Pringle said. “We will continue to champion concrete actions that advance the rights of children and youth, and in so doing, reduce poverty’s long shadow on the well-being of all residents of the province, young and old alike.”

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.

--30--

For more information contact:

Lisa Broda
(306) 933-6700

Twitter: @SaskAdvocate

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SaskAdvocate