

**Advocate for Children and Youth Concerned About Ministry of Social Services  
Staffing Levels in the North**

SASKATOON—Corey O'Soup, Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth, is concerned about media reports that up to 30 Ministry of Social Services positions are vacant in northern Saskatchewan.

"It is troubling for us at any time when this many front line positions are unfilled, but it is especially concerning in light of the recent suicides of six young girls in the north. We have heard first-hand accounts from professionals in the region who are feeling overwhelmed with the situation". In meetings with northern residents, professionals, and government officials, O'Soup has been adamant about the need for a long term solution for the region. "We applaud the government for moving quickly to bring in social workers from the south to help alleviate the stress of the vacancies. But this is a quick fix, and not a sustainable plan".

In 2009 the Government of Saskatchewan adopted Saskatchewan's *Children and Youth First Principles* that guide service provision to our children. These Principles state that all children are entitled to an equal standard of care, protection, and services. Furthermore, the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Convention) states children have the right to special protection and assistance (Article 20) when separated from their family. Children under the care of the Ministry are some of the province's most vulnerable and inadequate staffing levels pose a great risk to them. Under the Convention, children also have the right to protection from abuse and neglect (Article 19). The safety and wellbeing of children is compromised when there are few staff to perform the crucial services provided by the Ministry of Social Services.

O'Soup says the Advocate's office is well aware of the financial situation facing the province of Saskatchewan, and was pleased to read that essential services would be exempt from the hiring freeze recently announced. "We certainly hope that the government considers these important positions to be essential given the impact of their work to the region".

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