



News Release

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REPRESENTATIVE CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO BOLSTER CHILD PROTECTION FRONT LINES

VICTORIA – The provincial government must significantly boost its investment in front-line social workers in order to properly protect British Columbia’s most vulnerable children, says a report released today by B.C.’s Representative for Children and Youth.

The Thin Front Line: MCFD staffing crunch leaves social workers over-burdened, B.C. children under-protected reveals a dramatic mismatch between expectations placed on child protection social workers and the number of staff province-wide available to do the work. Despite the demands and complexity of the job increasing in recent years, there are fewer front-line child protection workers in B.C. in 2015 than there were in 2002.

As a result, the timelines set out in child protection standards routinely go unmet and children and youth are too often left in unsafe situations while social workers are increasingly disillusioned and burned out.

“The provincial government has known about this situation for years but has not done nearly enough to address it,” said Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. “Children and families in B.C. have paid the price for this and so have social workers whose job is already difficult enough without the impossible workloads and unfilled vacancies now occurring across MCFD offices.”

Turpel-Lafond calls on government to increase MCFD’s budget for front-line child protection so that high turnover, leaves, vacation and recruitment issues do not continue to routinely leave offices without enough staff. The report shows that, at any given time, 10 per cent of child protection positions in B.C. are unfilled. The result is a consistent failure to meet the ministry’s own standards – for example, the report shows more than 8,200 child protection incidents still left open after 90 days, well beyond the 30- to 45-day limit as called for in the standards.

“These standards are there for a reason – to ensure that kids are safe and the work must be done to ensure child protection services meet timelines and reach all impacted children and youth,” Turpel-Lafond said. “It has become normal for standards not to be met, and this has resulted in a serious safety problem. Social workers have told us they can’t meet standards because of their workload and staffing levels. Not one child protection social worker interviewed for this report can regularly meet prescribed timelines – that is very worrisome.”

The report included analysis of more than 200 MCFD documents and data sources, interviews with more than 50 front-line social workers and team leaders and an audit of 40 child protection files on four MCFD teams around B.C.

“Workers reported chronic levels of stress, high workloads and too much organizational change without sufficient support to make the changes,” Turpel-Lafond said. “They are concerned that working conditions are having a negative impact on the children and families they serve. Families are not being seen in time and there are too many delays in receiving services.”

MCFD has consistently underspent its staffing budget in order to meet other budget shortfalls and the Representative recommends that, going forward, money designated for front-line child protection not be used elsewhere. The Representative also recommends that MCFD create a new workload model that more accurately reflects today’s child protection realities and also take stronger measures to increase the number of Aboriginal child protection social workers.

“Social workers play a vital role in B.C. and should be supported in their work and provided with the time, tools and environment they need to make decisions in the best interest of children and their families,” Turpel-Lafond said. “It’s time government listened to these workers and took appropriate action. Children’s safety depends on this and cannot be taken for granted.”

The report can be accessed at <https://www.rcybc.ca/reports-and-publications>

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