



News Release

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YOUTH NEED IMPROVED, LONGER-TERM SUPPORT AS THEY TRANSITION INTO POST-CARE WORLD

VANCOUVER – The provincial government’s responsibility to “parent” the children in its care should not suddenly end when those children turn 19, British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said today in a special report.

In fact, the province has a responsibility to provide targeted services and supports to these youth well beyond their 19th birthdays to ensure that they have the same opportunities as their non-care peers, says *On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care*. The Representative released this report during a one-day conference at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue that explored ways to help former youth in care access and succeed in post-secondary education.

“This is a difficult period for any youth as they transition from being dependent to independence,” Turpel-Lafond said. “But for youth leaving government care, it can be a devastating time unless they are provided with proper support. Without it, they are less likely to attend post-secondary school and more likely to have trouble finding work, to become homeless, to run afoul of the criminal justice system and to have mental health or substance use issues.”

“The cost of our government and our society not helping these youth is far higher than the cost of providing adequate support to them during this critical period.”

More than 8,000 children are in the care of the B.C. government at any one time, with about 700 “aging out” in an average year. Many of the youth leaving care have no parents or extended family on whom to rely for help with post-secondary school, housing, living expenses, emotional support and advice. Youth leaving care also often face other significant challenges – many have had adverse and often traumatic life experiences that can affect their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

“These youth often need more help than their non-care peers, not less,” Turpel-Lafond said. “This report calls upon government to do what any prudent parent would do – provide the necessary planning, support, advice and resources to give their children the best possible chance of success.”

The Representative recommends that government consider policy and legislative changes to assist and support youth as they transition out of care. In the short-term, Turpel-Lafond calls for amendments to the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* to permit, on a case-by-case

basis, the extension of foster care up to age 25 for young people who are attending post-secondary institutions or apprenticeship programs.

The report also recommends that government establish a Youth Secretariat to lead collaboration between the ministries of Children and Family Development, Health, Education, Social Development and Social Innovation, and Justice to make services for youth leaving care more accessible and effective. One of the key mandates of the Secretariat would be to lead work on establishing a minimum income support level as well as access to health, dental, vision care and counseling for all former youth in care until age 25.

The Representative also recommends that the Ministry of Education ensure that every youth in government care has a clear education plan and skills training pathway to guide them up to and through the transition years. This planning should begin in Grade 6 and escalate each year through high school graduation.

Last spring, Turpel-Lafond called for B.C.'s post-secondary institutions to waive tuition fees for former youth in care. Thus far, Vancouver Island University and the University of British Columbia have taken this step, with more schools expected to follow. Earlier this year, Coast Capital Savings dedicated \$200,000 to initiate a fund to help defray living expenses of former youth in care while they attend post-secondary.

“While government has the same obligation as any parent to these youth, we can all do more to help this vulnerable population,” Turpel-Lafond said. “I challenge the business community, unions, other post-secondary institutions and the trades sector to step forward and do what it takes to make sure youth in care are actively brought on board and represented in the training pathways to trades and apprenticeships in equal measure to other post-secondary opportunities.”

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