



Media Statement

By Carol A. Chafe

Advocate for Children and Youth, Newfoundland and Labrador

June 18, 2014

The Health and Safety Needs of Children and Youth in Newfoundland & Labrador

On May 26, 2014 I provided notification to the Deputy Ministers of the Departments of Child Youth and Family Services, Health and Community Services, Education and Justice of my intention to conduct four investigations involving children who were in receipt of services provided by government departments and agencies. I have provided the same notification to the CEOs of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Western Health, Eastern Health, and Labrador Grenfell Health as well as the Chief of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP for Newfoundland and Labrador. These four new investigations are in addition to two ongoing investigations I called in January 2013. The purpose of the investigations is to determine whether these services met the needs of the children and youth, and whether their rights were upheld.

I am saddened and growing ever more concerned that there has been a steady increase in cases that have come to light, where children are found to have been living in circumstances where they have been subjected to physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse while government services are involved with their families. Despite assurances of change, both systemically and in practice on the frontlines, children and youth continue to be victimized.

The systems currently in place in this province to protect children and youth continue to have significant gaps which place children at risk and most regrettably, in 3 of the 6 cases under investigation, the children have died. If significant changes are not made, we run the risk of witnessing another generation of our children who will grow up with mental health issues and addictions and who will be subject to the continuing cycle of abuse.

I continuously call on government departments and agencies to work from a rights-based perspective safeguarding the rights of children and youth to receive quality health, education, justice and protection services – in short, a system that is robust in working in the best interest of our most vulnerable. I have challenged

professionals to collaborate, to communicate and mobilize their resources to ensure that children and youth receive timely and appropriate services and provide them with safety and security.

I acknowledge the hard working staff in government departments and agencies who are doing their very best to provide crucial supports and services to our children and youth. However, we can and must do better.

It is imperative that I receive accurate and timely information in the event of a critical incident or death of a child or youth. It has become apparent that the current mechanisms to inform my office of a critical incident or death of a child or youth are simply not adequate. To that end, I will be seeking legislative change that will require mandatory reporting by government departments and agencies to the Child and Youth Advocate when a child or youth receiving services dies or is involved in a critical incident. This immediate notification mechanism – similar to that which already exists in other provinces in Canada - will allow my office to mobilize quickly to investigate, produce recommendations and to ultimately prevent further harm.

All government departments and agencies must collaborate to actively create an environment where we are not simply providing temporary solutions, but are building communities where our children and youth can thrive.

Media Contact:
Heather Lannon
Systemic Consultant
Advocate for Children and Youth
709-753-3888
heathermlannon@ocya.nl.ca