



Press Statement

Advocate for Children and Youth Calls Four Investigations

September 28, 2016

Good Morning:

I will be giving a prepared statement, after which I will be happy to take questions.

On July 27, 2016, I provided notification to the Deputy Ministers of the Departments of Children, Seniors and Social Development (DCSSD) (formerly known as Child Youth and Family Services), Health and Community Services, Justice and Public Safety and Education and Early Childhood Development 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 Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, as well as the Chief of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the Commanding Officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The purpose of these investigations is to determine whether the services provided met the needs of these children and youth, and whether their right to services was upheld.

The systems currently in place in this province to provide services to children and youth continue to have significant gaps which place children at risk. I will provide a brief overview of each of the four new investigations:

- An eighteen- year old youth who committed suicide while residing in a group home and receiving services from DCSSD and the Regional Health Authority.
- A sixteen-year old youth with complex mental health needs whose health deteriorated while in her group home placement and had experienced several critical incidents. Eventually, she was moved to another service provider and is currently thriving in her new placement
- A family of several children, who had an open protective intervention file with DCSSD for several years, and yet they were allegedly maltreated and physically and sexually abused by their parents.

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- A young child who was placed in an alternate care arrangement by DCSSD as his mother required further supports. The child remained in that arrangement for a lengthy period of time and concerns have been identified with the services provided by DCSSD including a lack of permanency planning.

These four new investigations involve the death of one child and three critical incidents related to seven children. In addition to the four new investigations, we are currently conducting six previously called investigations which involve two deaths and four critical incidents involving eighteen children. This results in a total of ten investigations that involve the death of three children and seven critical incidents involving twenty-five children.

It is significant to note, that I only became aware of two of the three deaths and all seven critical incidents through avenues such as family members and/or media. One death, I was notified by the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development in compliance with the verbal agreement in place with that department since September 2014.

It is imperative that I receive accurate and timely information in the event of a critical incident or death of a child or youth. In November 2014, the House of Assembly passed a motion committing to legislation to respond to my request of June 2014 to amend the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* to ensure mandatory reporting by all government departments and agencies of critical incidents and deaths of children and youth receiving services. This proposed amendment, if approved, could result in this Office having one of the most progressive legislations in Canada and allow me to further fulfill my mandate as Child and Youth Advocate. It will further enhance the ability of this Office to ensure that the advocacy needs of children and youth are consistently met for all children and youth. Intensive work and collaboration took place from January to June 2015 and the House of Assembly closed before the Cabinet Submission was tabled.

In December 2015, the newly elected Premier included in his mandate letter to the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development “to work with your colleagues and the Child Youth Advocate to develop legislation for the House of Assembly that will make it mandatory to report deaths and critical incidents to the advocate”. In the Speech From the Throne, March 8, 2016, Government recognized “the importance of doing everything we can to protect children and youth and will be moving forward with this

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initiative". It is almost five years since I put forth the first recommendation to establish a protocol of reporting and over two years since I requested legislative changes to the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*.

I acknowledge the hard working staff in government departments and agencies who are striving to provide crucial supports and services to our children and youth. However, we can and must do better. We can no longer accept that "change takes time"; action must be taken immediately to make that "change now". We must ensure that not one more child or youth suffers because their right to services is not upheld.

Thank you for your time today and I welcome any general questions.

Carol A. Chafe

Advocate for Children and Youth