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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Children’s Advocate Releases Status Update of Government Progress on Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry Recommendations**

**MANITOBA** – Nearly three years after the provincial government received the final report of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, only 29% of the recommendations are completed, according to a status report released today by children’s advocate, Darlene MacDonald.

“The government has been surprisingly quiet on what action they have taken to respond to the recommendations made in the final report of the inquiry,” explained MacDonald, “We feel the public has a right to understand what improvements are being made in the wake of Phoenix’s tragic death. We want to encourage a more transparent public conversation.”

The report, ***So Much Left to Do: Status Report on the 62 Recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry***, describes which recommendations have activities underway, which are not progressing, and which are considered by the government to be completed. In developing the report, the children’s advocate examined internal government documents including implementation plans, project plans, and summaries. Publicly available documents related to the inquiry were also reviewed and meetings were held with government personnel.

“This brief report is not intended to assess how effective the progress has been; more time is needed to understand if the changes being made by the government are improving the lives of children and families in Manitoba,” explained MacDonald. “Instead, this report is meant to provide the public with some baseline indicators and to ensure the public is provided with information updates about what changes are planned and currently underway by government.”

As of September 30, 2016, today’s report indicates that 31 (50%) of the recommendations are **In Progress**, 13 (21%) of the recommendations are **Pending**, and 18 (29%) of the recommendations are considered by government to be **Complete/Complete & Ongoing** with no new action planned. The following status definitions were used by the children’s advocate:

ACTIVITY STATUS	DEFINITION
<b>IN PROGRESS</b> 31/62 (50%)	The organization or working group responsible has reported that activities beyond initial planning are underway, and processes have been created to ensure full implementation of the recommendation within established timelines.
<b>PENDING</b> 13/62 (21%)	The organization or working group responsible has reported some limited planning, but there is no foreseeable timeline of implementation at this time. Also includes situations where activities previously underway are now on hold.
<b>COMPLETE/ COMPLETE &amp; ONGOING</b> 18/62 (29%)	The organization or working group responsible has reported that they have taken all necessary steps to respond to the recommendation and no further activity is required. In some cases, initial implementation of the recommendation has occurred and includes ongoing activities.

In assigning statuses to each of the 62 recommendations, the children's advocate noted that there were some recommendations where government claims on progress are questionable. For example, Recommendation 33 of the final report of the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry described:

**That the *Social Work Profession Act* be:**

- a) **amended to require that anyone who practices social work in Manitoba, under whatever title, be registered with the Manitoba College of Social Workers; and**
- b) **proclaimed into law at the earliest possible date, following the receipt of the report of the transitional board.**

While the government indicates this recommendation is complete with no further action planned, the children's advocate notes that Commissioner Ted Hughes who oversaw the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry was explicit in calling on the government to ensure any individual providing social work-type services should be required to be registered and accountable to the professional regulatory body for social work practice in Manitoba. And yet, in April 2015, the government suddenly indicated it had only ever intended to protect the title of "social work" as opposed to requiring professional regulation of the actual practice. That caused an outcry from many in the public, including the Manitoba College of Social Workers, and Commissioner Hughes, who reportedly commented that, "It must not only protect the title, but also the practice." Today's report highlights that concerns remain over the government's action on this recommendation. "If this report was assessing and analyzing the government's progress, we would dispute their claim that this recommendation is appropriately addressed and complete," noted MacDonald. "We feel professional accountability is critical to improved service delivery, and the public has a right to know workers are well-trained and can be held to rigorous standards of practice."

Upon releasing the final report of the inquiry to the public nearly three years ago, the government apologized for failing Phoenix and committed to "immediately act" on all of the recommendations from the inquiry commission. While government announcements have mentioned actions taken as a result of the inquiry since then, there have been no publicly released documents that outline the specific progress made on the recommendations. In the status report released today, the children's advocate calls on government to regularly update the public on action being taken on each of the 62 inquiry recommendations.

**To view the full report visit: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-2016-So-Much-Left-To-Do-PSI-Status-report.pdf>**

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### **About the OCA**

The Office of the Children's Advocate is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or entitled to be receiving, services under *The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)* and *The Adoption Act*. The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing services after the death of any young person where that young person or their family was involved with child welfare services in the year preceding the death of the child.

### **For more information contact:**

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