



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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***Children's Advocate Act creates stand-alone legislation for the Children's Advocate but includes minimal service changes for children and youth***

**WINNIPEG** - Today the government introduced the new *Children's Advocate Act*. While we are pleased this new legislation extracts us from underneath the *Child and Family Services Act*, we are disappointed that fixing the concerns we have repeatedly raised on the limits of our legislation have again been delayed.

Over the last few years we have consistently spoken with the government and publicly about the barriers that exist in our work because of our narrow mandate. For example, we have made many recommendations about expanding our mandate which would allow us to provide support to children and youth involved in justice, education, and health where currently, vulnerable young people are often left to navigate those complex systems alone. We are disappointed that the government has indicated an expansion of our mandate, which was also recommended more than 18 months ago in the final report of the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry report, will require further consultation and is not included in today's version of the Act.

The new Act introduced today makes small provisions for our office to provide some information to the public, but still comes with many restrictions on what we can say and when we can say it. We have repeatedly urged the government to allow the independent voice of the Children's Advocate to be empowered to make decisions about when it is in the public interest to release information since the OCA is required to always prioritize the best interests and voices of children and youth. We need to be able to speak more openly about how public systems impact Manitoba's youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

The government today has indicated that this is the first of a two-phase process. The first phase gives us stand-alone legislation with no significant changes to the support we are able to provide to vulnerable young people. We are pleased to see that enshrined in this new Act is a clause requiring the government to begin an implementation process of the outstanding recommendations within six months. Important changes for children will occur when our office is given the ability to report publicly on a wider range of our advocacy and investigative work

and when we can offer support to young people who are receiving any public service in Manitoba. This new Act indicates the government must publicly announce their plan to implement those critical changes within fifteen months. We hope the time between now and then will include thoughtful planning with our office on how our services of support and review on behalf of young people can reflect the intention of the government to be accountable to its youngest citizens.

We wish the process to strengthen our legislation was moving faster. Children and youth don't care what legislation is called – they only care about what help they can get when they are feeling voiceless. However, we hope that this first step is the start of real and significant change for young people and their families in the near future and we remain ready and eager to help move this process along.

*The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. The OCA advocates directly with and on behalf of children and youth in the province who are receiving, or entitled to be receiving, child welfare or adoption services. The OCA promotes the rights and best interests of children and youth within public services to ensure decisions impacting young people reflect their best interests.*

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