

Canadian Council of
Child and Youth Advocates

Conseil canadien des
défenseurs des enfants
et des jeunes

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August 22, 2014

Premier Kathleen Wynne
Chair, Council of the Federation
Council of the Federation Secretariat
Suite 630, 360 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 7X7

Dear Premier Wynne;

Our purpose in writing is twofold: we urge you to discuss at the upcoming meeting of the Council of the Federation the national tragedy reflected in the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children taken into government care across Canada; and, we encourage you to attend to this crucial issue by developing specific national solutions.

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (the Council) is an alliance of government-appointed children's advocates from nine provinces and one territory. We expect the new Representative for Children and Youth for Nunavut to become a member of Council at our fall meeting. We are all Independent Officers of the Legislature in our respective jurisdictions. Although the enabling statutes under which we operate differ somewhat, as members of the Council we share a common commitment to further the voice, rights and dignity of children. Through our participation in the Council, we identify issues of mutual concern and strive to promote improvements nation-wide.

In our work, we see the devastation of deep-seated intergenerational trauma in Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal children have poorer health status, they lag significantly in educational outcomes, and they are too often the victims of sexual exploitation and violence. Many of them live in deep poverty.

The Honourable Ted Hughes said in a June 2014 speech in B.C. that "the horrors of life" that cause Aboriginal children to be taken into care and away from their parents in gross disproportion to other Canadian children is a "significant national embarrassment." We agree with Mr. Hughes' assessment, and with his call to search for a solution and a step-by-step process for implementation of that solution,

This is reflected in our June 2010 report *Aboriginal Children and Youth in Canada: Canada Must Do Better*. In that report, we called on national, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to take urgent, coordinated action to improve the living conditions and well-being of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada. We are concerned that there has been no concrete activity taken to respond to this urgent call.

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Similarly, no action has been taken in response to our November 2011 report, *Aboriginal Children – Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow*, submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to highlight the critical circumstances facing Aboriginal children today. For most Aboriginal children in Canada, circumstances are not improving; for many Aboriginal children, they are getting worse. The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates calls on the Council of the Federation, at its August 2014 meeting, to take steps towards the creation of a comprehensive strategy that will lead to far fewer Aboriginal children and youth in government care. We do not accept that the current situation of over-representation in care is the way it will always be.

Specifically, a comprehensive strategy must put the priority on outcomes that can be measured to identify achievement of goals. We look to the recommendations in our 2010 report and offer the following as a framework for such a plan:

1. Creation of a statutory officer independent from the Parliament of Canada, but accountable to the Parliament, a National Children's Commissioner with particular emphasis on Aboriginal children and youth and the national dimension of the work on programs, evaluation and outcomes
2. A national initiative to measure and report on child welfare, education and health outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. This will require creation and coordination of data, and clear assignment of roles and accountabilities
3. Creation of a national Aboriginal children and youth participation initiative, with training on child and youth rights, leadership, voice, and civic participation, to fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and reduce vulnerability
4. That a special conference of Federal/Provincial/Territorial First Ministers, with Aboriginal leaders, and child and youth delegates, be convened to receive a report on outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. A national plan to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth would be a desired outcome of this process.

We look forward to learning of your discussions on this topic, and of your commitment to a comprehensive strategy to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth across Canada.

Sincerely,



Del Graff
President
Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates