



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 11, 2021

Manitoba Advocate releases major child death investigation, examining maltreatment of 19 children under age five

Report notes government progress on 55% of Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry recommendations

MANITOBA, TREATY ONE TERRITORY – The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) has released a new special report that examines the lives of 19 children who died after being severely maltreated while under the age of five.

Still Waiting: Investigating Child Maltreatment after the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry is being published roughly seven years after *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All Our Children* – the final report from the inquiry led by Commissioner Ted Hughes. Today’s report from the Acting Manitoba Advocate tracks the province’s progress on Hughes’ 62 recommendations and in her report, the Acting Manitoba Advocate makes five more recommendations for child safety and system change.

“What Manitobans will see in our independent report is not nearly enough change has occurred within public systems and child-serving organizations to protect kids. This should be among our highest priorities as adults,” said Ainsley Krone, the Acting Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth.

“Children are still dying of maltreatment similar to what Phoenix Sinclair experienced and what is clear is that systemic inequities and social determinants of health are contributing factors in these deaths,” she continued. “More resources and improved supports for families and communities in Manitoba are needed to help them with preventing child maltreatment. Too often, help still arrives after a child’s death, when what families need is help much earlier in establishing safety so children are protected.”

Krone’s five recommendations made to the provincial government and child welfare authorities are:

1. **RECOMMENDATION ONE (System Level):** The Government of Manitoba must implement the outstanding recommendations from the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry.
2. **RECOMMENDATION TWO (Community Level):** Consistent with *Call to Action 5* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Government of Manitoba must work with First Nations and Metis governments and community stakeholders to ensure access to evidence-informed and culturally-safe parenting programs and resources for caregivers of children under the age of five across Manitoba, with attention to rural and remote communities.

3. **RECOMMENDATION THREE (Organization Level):** Each child and family services authority must develop and provide the necessary resources to implement a culturally-appropriate reunification policy within their agencies.
4. **RECOMMENDATION FOUR (Direct Service Level):** Each child and family services authority must ensure their agencies complete case reviews for every child in care under age five, for whom reunification is planned.
5. **RECOMMENDATION FIVE (Direct Service Level):** The Department of Families, through the Joint Training Team, must develop and administer mandatory training for front line workers and supervisors on the risk and protective factors of child maltreatment and best practices for reunification.

In Hughes' inquiry report from 2014, he laid out 62 recommendations to better protect Manitoba children after the death of five-year-old Phoenix in June 2005. Despite his recommendations for sweeping changes and repeated acknowledgements by the provincial government in years since that improvements are underway, the Advocate's latest investigation found that progress has been slow.

According to the Advocate's analysis, **55 per cent of Hughes' recommendations have been completed** so far, seven years after the release of his report. At the current rate of progress, it will be 2028 before all of the recommendations are completed.

"While individual intentions are often good, what is clear is that half measures are not working to reduce maltreatment and prevent the deaths of children and youth. They deserve – and Manitobans collectively deserve – better than an incremental approach to protecting the youngest and most dependent in our communities," Krone said.

Some major changes have occurred in Manitoba's child welfare system in the past 15 years, including the continued devolution of the system, new child welfare agencies being established, and, more recently, federal legislation aimed at ensuring children can be looked after by their home communities, with sovereign systems for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. While these large-scale changes alter jurisdictions, legal mandates, stakeholder responsibilities, and other structural factors, the Advocate's office continues to question whether outcomes and safety for children are improving.

Along with the *Still Waiting* report release today, MACY has prepared a fact sheet for caregivers that includes parenting and mental health resources. The fact sheet is available on **ManitobaAdvocate.ca**.

With the proclamation of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* in March 2018, MACY can now track progress on all of its recommendations to government and publicize child death investigations and systemic research through the Advocate's special reports.

To read MACY's past special reports and see recommendation tracking, visit our website: **ManitobaAdvocate.ca**.

About MACY: MACY is an independent, non-partisan office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. It represents the rights, interests, and viewpoints of children, youth, and young adults throughout Manitoba who are receiving or entitled to public services, including child and family, adoption, disability, mental health, addictions, education, victim supports, or youth justice. The office does this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Advocacy also involves reviewing public services after the death of any young person when that young person or their family was involved with a reviewable service as defined in *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* (the ACYA). Additionally, the Manitoba Advocate is empowered to make recommendations to government and other public bodies, conduct child-centred research, disseminate findings, and educate the public on children's rights and any other matter under the ACYA.

Media contact:

Jessica Botelho-Urbanski, Manager, Public Education

Phone: 204-451-6111

Email: jbotelho@manitobaadvocate.ca