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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***2017-2018 Annual Report from the Manitoba Advocate Highlights the Expansion of the Office***

**The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth will be available to media to discuss this report on Monday, November 19, between 11:00 am – 1:30 pm.**

**MANITOBA** – To kick off Children’s Rights Week, the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth today released her 2017-2018 annual report, which provides a summary of the activities and initiatives underway at the office. The theme of the report, *Preparing for Change*, examines the vast amount of work that was undertaken at the Advocate’s office as the Advocate prepared for the significant changes that took effect March 15, 2018, with the coming into force of *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.

“Everything has changed at the office with the new Act,” Penrose explained. “Our mandate has grown exponentially, which has meant new areas of expertise in advocacy, new responsibilities in expanded child death investigations, an expansion of our staff, updating and changing nearly all of our processes and policies...even our name has changed!” While the office began the fiscal reporting year (April 2017) under the name Office of the Children’s Advocate, as of March 2018, it is now known as **the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY)** office.

MACY’s efforts during the 2017-2018 fiscal year included building the strong foundation needed to continue to be powerful and effective advocates for children, youth, and young adults across the province. The team also delivered more than 80 presentations, studied legislation, policies, standards, and regulations for each of the new service domain areas, and hosted trainings and development sessions for the MACY team in advance of the new Act coming into force.

Alongside all of the expansion preparations, MACY remained active under the previous mandate as well with 2,926 new requests for advocacy support services received by the team. In the child death investigations program, the Manitoba Advocate was notified of 187 child deaths, including 20 suicide deaths of youth. Suicide remains a key area of concern that the Manitoba Advocate has decided will again be an area of focus as the office will launch Phase 4 of its ongoing, multi-year suicide study.

The coming year will also see the office focusing on current key concerns including the critical need for improved mental health, detox, and addiction treatment; the use of pepper spray and segregation on youth in custody; and the sexual exploitation of youth by adults in our communities. The Manitoba Advocate intends to release public reports involving these issues in the coming year.

In the months to come, the Manitoba Advocate will also look to the Manitoba government to complete its work on bringing into force the full scope of the *Advocate for Children and Youth Act*. As the new legislation is rolling out in phases, what remains outstanding and not yet in force is the serious injury reporting and the Advocate's ability to centrally collect and analyze how children are sustaining injuries in Manitoba, and the expansions to the child death review responsibilities. In the latter, the limited current roll out means that some death notifications that should be in scope for review by the Manitoba Advocate remain out of scope, and some of those out-of-scope deaths include suicides and homicides. "If we are not reviewing those deaths," noted Penrose, "it may be that no one is looking into them and all lessons that must be learned in those circumstances are then lost."

The Manitoba Advocate and her entire team are committed to child- and youth-centred work. "Our new legislation is an important step forward for the office and for families in Manitoba," Penrose explained. "We carry the responsibility for advocating for increased transparency and accountability from public services and government departments, and we do so always remembering that these important changes came from the many recommendations of the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. We move forward in memory of her legacy and with an unwavering commitment to the children, youth, and young adults in our province."

**To read the full annual report visit: <http://manitobaadvocate.ca/wp-content/uploads/MACY-Annual-Report-2017-2018.pdf>**

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#### **About MACY**

The Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent 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 be receiving 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 in the preceding 12 months with a reviewable service as defined in *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*. Additionally, The Manitoba Advocate is empowered to make recommendations to government, conduct child- and youth-centred research, disseminate findings, and educate the public on children's rights and any matter dealt with under *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*.

#### **For media and other enquiries, please contact:**

Ainsley Krone, Deputy Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth  
Cell: 204-451-3190, [akrone@manitobaadvocate.ca](mailto:akrone@manitobaadvocate.ca)