

## Introduction

For ease of reference, the present document is a Plain Language Summary of the 20 recommendations advanced by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate in response to the proposed draft *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* and is available on the home page of our Office's website. The full text of the 20 Recommendations (with accompanying Rationale) is set out in the document called "OCYA Submission to the Standing Committee on Health and Social Development in response to the Proposed *Child, Youth and Family Services Act: A Rare Moment in Time – An Opportunity to Establish a Culture Shift in Child Protection Legislation that Recognizes PEI Children and Youth as Individuals with Rights to be Respected and Voices to be Heard*" (February 2022). This Submission is also available on the homepage of our Office's website at [www.childandyouthadvocatepei.ca](http://www.childandyouthadvocatepei.ca).

When considering the critical importance of legislation that will intimately impact the lives of children and youth, it is my strongly held opinion that these recommendations are the minimum required to create truly rights-adhering child welfare legislation. The recommended provisions cannot wait for a five-year review of the legislation, and nor should they be left to later regulatory or policy drafting. Regulations and policies provide the details of how services are to be administered, but the legislation provides the legal obligations, and this is where rights must be enshrined.

### Summary of OCYA Recommendations for the Proposed *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*

1. An independent Child Rights Impact Assessment was completed on the draft legislation, and all ten of its recommendations should be incorporated into the new Act.
2. The proposed legislation should be referred to the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Social Development for a detailed review.
3. A comprehensive child rights section should be added to the legislation, including rights to have their opinions considered, to privacy, to appropriate education, to health services, and to recreational activities.
4. The rights of children included in the legislation should be modelled on Ontario's legislation, in which there is a clear description of specific rights for children and youth receiving child welfare services, as well as for children and youth in government care. The legislation must also clearly state the obligations on service providers to respect the rights of children and youth.
5. The legislation should include an accessible and independent complaints mechanism for children and youth, including access to representatives and an appeal process.
6. An obligation should be included to require service providers to facilitate contact by children and youth with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, including the ability to have private communications.
7. Clear requirements should be included in the legislation to mirror the access to information powers under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*.
8. Children and youth should have the right to standing as a party in proceedings under the proposed *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, along with the right to have legal representation appointed.

9. The proposed *Child, Youth and Family Services Act* should include criteria to assist a court in determining whether legal representation of a child is necessary to ensure that the child's interests are adequately protected in a proceeding under the Act.
10. The proposed legislation should clearly provide that in all instances where decisions are being made that impact children and youth, their views and wishes must be ascertained and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
11. The proposed legislation should include children and youth and a representative from the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate in the list of participants for purposes of the definitions of "family group conference" and "mediation".
12. The definition of 'the best interests of the child' in the proposed legislation should be more comprehensive, reflecting Indigenous rights as well as equality rights of children and youth with disabilities and children and youth from minority groups.
13. The provision that allows a court to exclude a child from a child protection hearing or any part of it without specifying any criteria should be amended to stipulate that such judicial discretion can only be exercised when determining that it is the best interests of the child to make an exclusionary order.
14. There should be specific provisions that require Family Intervention Plans to include educational, recreational, and developmental considerations, along with a clear statement that each plan must reflect the best interests of the child or youth.
15. A requirement of mandatory periodic review of the legislation should be incorporated in the proposed *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, and this review should include a Child Rights Impact Assessment that seeks out and includes the views of children and youth impacted by the legislation, as well as systematic data collection and qualitative assessment of the impacts and outcomes of the services provided.
16. The periodic reviews of the legislation should be conducted by a Standing Committee of the PEI Legislative Assembly, with meaningful consultation of children and youth and the active participation of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, with results to be made publicly available.
17. Provisions of the proposed legislation respecting the application of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families* should specify that all Indigenous children and youth in PEI will be treated in accordance with the principles and standards set out in the federal legislation, and should also reference the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
18. The legislation should include a Preamble or Statement of Principles that clearly situates the child and the child's rights at the centre of decisions.
19. The proposed legislation should make explicit that the duty to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a personal duty that cannot be delegated, and that the continuing obligation to report applies to every person.
20. The definition of "youth" in the proposed legislation as meaning "a child who is 16 or 17 years of age" should be amended to conform with the definition of "youth" in the PEI *Child and Youth Advocate Act* meaning "a person over the age of 12 years and under the age of 18 years."

