



The following is distributed on behalf of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Press Release

May 20, 2026

For Immediate Release

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Calls to Action Regarding the 2026–2027 PEI Budget

The 2026-2027 Operating Budget released by the Government of Prince Edward Island has generated significant public discussion. At the centre of much of this discourse is the apparent pattern of budgetary decisions that disproportionately impact Island children and youth, not only through cuts and reductions to programs and services, but also to passing the burdens of both debt and climate change impacts on to future generations.

“Children and youth are uniquely vulnerable in that they are largely dependent upon adults to protect and support them, and they cannot vote to exercise any power over the decisions that impact them,” said Child and Youth Advocate, Marvin Bernstein. “The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is very clear in its guidance that government should avoid withdrawing funding or diverting resources away from existing programs that are safeguarding the rights of children and youth and that any cuts or reductions that impact those rights should only be made after all other options have been exhausted”.

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) highlights the 2021 commitment of the Government of Prince Edward Island to apply and publicly disclose a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to all policy and legislative development within government, and questions if government applied CRIA in the budget cycle process.

“The concern is not about one isolated budget line or program,” said Bernstein. “The broader issue is whether children’s rights and best interests were meaningfully assessed and given priority throughout the budget planning process, which requires complete transparency on the part of government”.

The OCYA expresses serious concerns regarding the reduction of funding for pedagogical supports in the early years sector. There has been a continuous outcry in opposition to these reductions by service providers within the sector and from the community at large. These funding reductions were made without due consultation with the Early Years sector, the community or the OCYA and will have deeper impacts on some children longer term, due to sudden disruption in care and relationships.

Additionally, the OCYA expresses serious concerns regarding the relocation of the Child and Youth Psychiatric Unit (CYPU) from Hillsborough Hospital to a smaller temporary space adjacent to the Adult Mental Health Emergency Department at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Explained as a decision under the Capital Budget process, the OCYA notes ongoing frontline opposition to the

relocation, and argues that fiscal pressures cannot outweigh a child's right to access the highest attainable standard of health and mental health services.

In its Statement of Concern, the OCYA advances 7 Calls to Action, urging transparency and accountability on the part of government to:

1. Produce, and publicly disclose, a comprehensive and exhaustive list of all budgetary cuts and reductions, including all eliminated or narrowed programs and service delivery streams, impacting children and youth in the 2026-2027 PEI Operating Budget.
2. Reconsider cuts and reductions to services and programs for children and youth that have been earmarked in the existing 2026-2027 PEI Operating Budget, including reductions to pedagogical supports in Early Years Centres;
3. Apply a child rights lens to the existing 2026-2027 PEI Operating Budget to avoid negative present and long-term consequences to present and future Island children and youth, giving special emphasis to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 19 and 2022 Concluding Observations to Canada;
4. Publicly disclose the criteria for making budgetary decisions affecting Island children and youth, including the disclosure of all Child Rights Impact Assessments that have been conducted during the budget cycle process;
5. Reconsider the decision, made pursuant to the 2026-2027 Capital Budget, to immediately relocate the Child and Youth Psychiatric Unit to the location of the former Adult Mental Health and Addictions Short-Stay Unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, pending the completion and public disclosure of a Child Rights Impact Assessment and giving special consideration to the voices of children, youth and their families and to Unit staff, as well as to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comments No. 15 and No. 19;
6. Apply a child rights lens to future PEI budgets to avoid negative consequences for present and future Island children and youth, giving special emphasis to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 19 and 2022 Concluding Observations to Canada; and
7. Commit to meaningful consultation, in which voices are sought and duly considered in decision-making, with frontline service providers, children, youth and their families, and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, as part of any budget cycle process in which the rights and best interests of children and youth are affected.

"Budgets are not only financial documents; they are statements of values and priorities. Children and youth should never bear a disproportionate burden of fiscal restraint, particularly when governments have committed internationally to protect and prioritize their rights and well-being", stated Bernstein.

MEDIA CONTACT

Penny Woodgate, Executive Assistant/Office Manager
902-368-5630
voiceforchildren@ocyapei.ca