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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Raising the Bar on Children's Rights on PEI

CHARLOTTETOWN - Prince Edward Island's Child and Youth Advocate, Marv Bernstein, asks all Islanders to join in recognizing National Child Day on November 20th. This date is important in Canada and around the world because it was on this date in 1989 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a universal treaty to protect and promote the human rights of every child around the globe. "The UNCRC takes the perspective of the whole child and this same vision informs the work of the PEI Office of the Child and Youth Advocate," states Bernstein.

"In Prince Edward Island, we have an additional cause for celebration in that November 20th of this year represents the third anniversary of our governing legislation, the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, unanimously passing third reading in the PEI Legislative Assembly before being ultimately proclaimed in force on July 15th, 2020," says Bernstein.

One of the guiding principles of the UNCRC is Article 12, which "assure[s] to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Here it is important to recognize, as noted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation of the UNCRC, that children have rights starting at birth and research has shown that they are "able to form views from the youngest age, even when they are unable to express them verbally." Such non-verbal forms of communication of views would include "play, body language, facial expression and drawing and painting."

"One of the most valuable ways we have to raise the bar on children's rights is by amplifying child and youth voices," states Bernstein. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate is currently recruiting new child and youth members to the Office's Child and Youth Advisory Committee. "Using a matrix model, we identify Office priorities, gaps in diversity representation and participation by underserved children and youth with valued lived experiences," states Bernstein. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate encourages child and youth applicants interested in expressing their views to help inform legislation, policies and programs, on behalf of all PEI children and youth, to contact the Office directly to learn more about this exciting opportunity. Everyone is welcome to apply. We particularly encourage children and youth who are Indigenous, persons of colour, and those having non-traditional gender identities, as well as children and youth in care, to add their voices to the Child and Youth Advisory Committee. Please contact the Office at voiceforchildren@ocyapei.ca or 902-368-5630 for further information.

National Child Day not only serves as a reminder that children's rights are important, but also represents a call to action for every Islander to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of children in PEI all year round. It is also an important day for reflecting on how far our province has come in our progress to implement children's rights. "On December 13th, 2021, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UNCRC. After three decades, it is imperative that we move beyond lofty rhetoric to concrete action steps and set a high bar for PEI's implementation of children's rights in all service sectors and walks of life," says Bernstein.

"We are fortunate to be living in PEI, which does not have the multiple levels of governmental bureaucracy found in larger jurisdictions and has the potential to be counted as a leader throughout Canada and internationally in the protection and promotion of children's human rights. Together, we can pave the way for children and youth to be confident in exercising their own rights and respecting the rights of others, and in the process, collectively achieve a necessary culture or paradigm shift in PEI, where there is genuine respect for both the evolving capacities and meaningful participation of all children and youth in those matters and decisions affecting them," states Bernstein.

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