



Boys & Girls Clubs
of Canada

WESTERN REGION

October 14, 2016

Standing Committee on
Legislative Offices
c/o Committee Clerk
3rd Floor, 9820 – 107 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 1E7

Dear members of the Standing Committee,

Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada are dedicated to supporting and encouraging children and youth as they grow and develop. We are a national charity serving 95 member Clubs that provide services to 200,000 young people across Canada. In Alberta, 25 local community Boys and Girls Clubs offer quality social, recreation, education, job readiness and leadership programs in more than 70 service locations, with more than half offering licensed out-of-school and daycare programs. We are located in urban, rural and remote locations with the only on-reserve Club in Canada located here in Saddle Lake. Over 35,000 children and youth attend annually and many families benefit from the support offered through our Clubs.

As a leading service provider for children and youth in the province, Boys and Girls Clubs in Alberta are pleased to provide input into the Committee's review of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. Specifically, we propose improvements in four areas; broaden the definition of youth, speed up processing times, set up systems so that young people do not have to repeatedly re-tell their story and implement a review cycle of the Act to ensure legislation stays relevant to the needs of Alberta's most vulnerable citizens.

Are age limits for services provided appropriate?

We ask the government to broaden its definition of youth to young people ages 13 to 24. This would ensure that youth do not age out before they are able to make successful transitions. This will also ensure that youth can obtain the help they need as of 13, when they are legally entitled to obtain health and social services without the consent of their parent or guardian as a mature minor.

Currently the Act outlines services for several age groups: legal representation up to 18 years; Individual advocacy under 24, until 18, or up to 27 years depending on the circumstances; investigative reviews up to 26 years or 24 years depending on who received service and financial care and up to 27 years for youth in the justice system. It is a confusing and ineffective way of supporting Alberta's most vulnerable people.

Provincial and federal youth employment programs extend to age 30, and Alberta's own Youth Plan defines homeless youth between the ages of 13 and 24. Alberta's Child and Family Services Authorities recently increased the definition of youth to include those up to the age of 24. We know that youth

experience longer transitions to adulthood than a generation ago – this is especially true when a young person has experienced violence and abuse.

We suggest that the Child and Youth Advocacy Act broaden the definition of youth to include 13-24 year olds, and consider extending it further to 27 so that there is one consistent age for all youth who are covered under the Act.

Do you have any other suggestions or comments about the Child and Youth Advocate Act?

1. Speed up Advocate Investigation times

When a young person is at risk of violence or exploitation and a call is made to the Child and Youth Advocate, every day that goes by without intervention, places them at even higher risk. We urge the government to invest in the system to speed up processing times and ensure the safety of Alberta's most vulnerable young people is paramount. Timely review by the Advocate in regards to setting maximum times in which a case is investigated and/or concluded will provide greater safeguards for those most at risk.

2. Implement a 'one-time-tell' policy

In the course of obtaining the help and support they need, vulnerable young people are called upon to tell and re-tell their story at multiple levels of the investigation. This process re-traumatizes those who are in most need of protection and sets up additional barriers to seeking and obtaining help. Sharing information between professionals on a 'need to know basis should be encouraged to minimize children and youth having to repeat their story. This process would also enhance the service and safety of the children and youth, as well as the professionals providing the service. We invite the government to implement a more sensitive practice that would not require youth to tell their story more than once.

3. Institute a mandatory time frame to review the Act

Legislation needs to be current and responsive to the needs of those it is designed to protect. Having an out of date or irrelevant Act will place children and youth at higher risk. We recommend the government institute a mandatory review date of the Child and Youth Advocate Act that would not exceed a five year period.

We thank the Committee for its important work in reviewing the Child and Youth Advocate Act. Boys and Girls Clubs are honored to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the discussion. We are committed to working with the government to ensure that all of Alberta's children and youth have the opportunity to thrive.

Cordially,



Karen McCullagh
Regional Director, Western Region
Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada