



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **Saskatchewan Advocate Remains Concerned on Group Home Care – Issues Progress Report**

**Saskatoon** – Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Lisa Broda, tables progress report on recent concerns in group home care since the release of her March 3, 2021 special investigation report entitled, *Someone to Watch Over Us*.

The special investigation report highlighted the case of Elijah, a seven-year-old non-verbal boy with autism who ran in the early morning hours from his group home in June 2020 and was found naked and confused in a Tim Horton's parking lot. After investigating this case within the organizational structure of the Ministry of Social Services (the Ministry), the Advocate concluded this incident was illustrative of a system that, "does not have a coordinated oversight or properly resourced scheme that proactively monitors well-defined, measurable quality-of-care indicators." The Advocate issued three broad systemic recommendations as a result, all of which the Ministry accepted.

Today's *Progress Report* provides the basis for the Advocate's ongoing concerns with the oversight services provided by the Ministry for children in group home care, especially those with high medical and developmental needs.

In the summer of 2021, numerous serious incidents, all of which were investigated and substantiated, occurred in a Ministry-contracted group home in Prince Albert for high needs children that began operating in March 2021. These incidents included insufficiently trained staff, poor supervision, lack of nurturing and harsh treatment toward children in the home, medical neglect, insufficient nutritious food and medical supplies, disorganization, and operational discord. The six resident children, all with serious medical and developmental needs, ranging in age from five to 11, were moved to new homes.

In August 2021 a five-year-old child in a Regina group home, with undiagnosed autism and who was known to run and be attracted to water, ran from his one-on-one group home staff while unsupervised. This child was found and extracted from a nearby pond where he was floating and making gurgling sounds. He was released from hospital the following day and was placed into a different group home operated by the same organization. In early October this same child, now six years old, again ran from his one-on-one supervision and was found over five kilometers away at a retail store. Fortunately, he suffered no physical injuries.

"It is unbelievable how this can continue to occur with children who require the most intensive care and supervision to ensure their safety and protection, or any child for that matter," said Broda. "Until the Ministry adopts an oversight model to its 139 licensed contracted group homes in Saskatchewan, I have little confidence in the Ministry's ability to keep children in these homes safe."

There must be immediate, proper and appropriate resources, top down, to ensure group home oversight,” said Broda. These incidents show further evidence that the Ministry’s current structure needs comprehensive change as envisioned in the three recommendations from *Someone to Watch Over Us*.

Today’s *Progress Report* provides an update on the Ministry’s responses to the Advocate’s March 2021 recommendations, and steps taken since that time. The Advocate indicates the slow movement on achieving the recommendations made in March will continue to place children with highly specialized needs in harm’s way. “Ultimately, we must have confidence that the Ministry will find an effective governance model before an even more serious tragedy occurs,” said Broda.

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