

Advocate for Children and Youth Tables 2023 Annual Report

SASKATOON – Today, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Dr. Lisa Broda, tabled her 2023 Annual Report in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, shedding light on the pressing challenges faced by children and youth in the province.

The report highlights the current realities of young people, especially noting increases in suicide attempts and suicidal ideation, mental health and addiction issues, lack of access to services, and systemic factors that contribute to adverse outcomes. Simultaneously, 2023 advocacy casework revealed chronic staffing shortages in all child-serving ministries and ongoing issues in group home care. “Despite some investments, more is needed to address the complex issues faced by young people,” stated Dr. Broda.

Three public reports were released in 2023. *In Their Sufficient Interest?* revealed issues in the Ministry of Social Services’ Person of Sufficient Interest program. The resulting recommendations relate to assessment and case management processes, insufficient contact with biological families, and a lack of clarity in legislative provisions. The Advocate’s review of *The Use of Preferred First Name and Pronouns by Students Policy* raised concerns about potential violations of students’ constitutional and human rights, encouraged use of capacity rather than an age criterion, and recommended a concrete plan to increase supports to assist students in connecting with their families. In *Making the Grade – Moving Forward in Independent Education*, the Advocate made recommendations to the Ministry of Education to improve oversight, student participation, and accountability for quality of education in independent schools. “As with all recommendations we issue, we will continue to collaborate with the involved ministries to encourage their full implementation,” stated Broda.

In 2023, the Advocate noted progress on recommendations from systemic investigations and advocacy efforts in recent years.

- Recommendations made in the 2022 *Someone to Watch Over Us* report resulted in the Ministry of Social Services making significant improvements to oversight and to service provision within group homes, although concerns regarding quality of care persist.
- From the 2022 report, *Desperately Waiting*, the Government of Saskatchewan has assembled an oversight team to coordinate the implementation of the Advocate’s recommendations, with noted progress in areas such as the development of residential homes for youth with mental health or addictions needs. Noted progress was also made in *Saskatchewan’s Children and Youth Strategy: Strong Families, Strong Communities. A Better Quality of Life* (released by the government in 2022), by identifying programs that fall under its five theme areas. This ongoing work will be crucial to fully address all

recommendations from *Desperately Waiting*, including strengthening *Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy* in progress outcomes.

- In follow up to previous recommendations to the Ministry of Education to address bullying and physical restraints in schools, Ministry officials have now provided an action plan to review and address recommendations within policies, although progress and timelines for implementation are currently unknown.

The 2023 Annual Report further highlights staff advocacy and community engagement throughout the province, including the frequently requested *Speak for Yourself* self-advocacy workshop, in which staff facilitated 116 events to over 2700 young participants. "We are pleased with the success of this workshop as it equips young people with essential self-advocacy skills in addition to learning about their unique rights," said Broda.

"Given the persistent issues facing children and youth, and our many outstanding recommendations, I urge the government, child-serving ministries, and other stakeholders to prioritize the well-being of children and youth and to work together to implement the necessary changes," said Broda. In doing so, the Advocate urges the government to show progress by including benchmark targets and indicators within *Saskatchewan's Children and Youth Strategy* to measure and achieve better outcomes for the province's youth.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an Office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Advocate leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province's young people independent and apart from government. The office's vision is that the rights, well-being, and voices of children and youth are respected, valued, and supported to assist young people to reach their full potential.

For full details visit saskadvocate.ca to view the 2023 Annual Report.

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