

Advocate optimistic about Saskatchewan's budget, calls on Government to enhance investments with overarching poverty reduction strategy

SASKATOON – Bob Pringle, Advocate for Children and Youth, was pleased to see that the Government of Saskatchewan has increased spending in the Child and Family Agenda by another \$8.7 million in the 2014-15 budget, and committed to establishing independent legal representation for children and youth involved in child protection with the establishment of a Council for Children.

“I’m encouraged with the direction Government is taking in addressing the education and employment gaps for First Nations and Metis people, developing a mental health and addictions action plan, and adding more prekindergarten and childcare spaces, positive parenting programs and other services for families,” Pringle said.

“I’m also very happy that the Government is establishing a program for independent legal representation for children and youth in child welfare court proceedings. We’ve worked with the Pro Bono Law Society of Saskatchewan since 2007 so children and youth would have access to these services, all while advocating that they need to be independently structured and funded. With this new Counsel for Children, we can guarantee that children and youth involved in child protection cases will have lawyers to help them with the court process, and make sure that their opinions are heard and taken into consideration.”

Pringle was also encouraged to see new investments for Autism interventions, intensive Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention programming and community supports, anti-bullying and cyberbullying strategy, the HUB model, affordable housing, and more support for adults with disabilities.

The Government also announced funding for a pilot “hotspotting” program in Saskatoon and Regina to provide better health care services to a small number of people who have been relying on repeated visits to the emergency room for health care.

“I know that something isn’t working when people are visiting the emergency room many times a year. Finding a way to help these vulnerable people in the community or in their homes is both less expensive, and makes for better care. It’s a great example of taking a different approach when things aren’t working.”

“It’s also a good example of the high cost of poverty, which is at the root of so many of these intractable issues in our society,” Pringle said. “I’d like to see all of this work as part of a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.”

“At the moment, Saskatchewan is one of only two provinces without such a strategy, the other being British Columbia. Our Government is already well on its way to developing such an overarching strategy, with

investments in the Child and Family Agenda, and initiatives such as the anti-bullying and cyberbullying strategy and upcoming mental health and addictions action plan,” he said.

Finally, Pringle would have liked to see an increase in food allowances for families living on social assistance. “Sometimes families have to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table; I think we can do better here.”

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a small team of regional advocates, investigators and other staff who work on behalf of the province's young people. Our vision is that the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy, programs and practice.

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