

Advocate for Children and Youth releases investigation of death of youth in custody

REGINA – The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Bob Pringle, released *The Silent World of Jordan* today. This special investigative report offers an extended account of services provided to a First Nations youth with a hearing disability who died in September 2013 while in the care and custody of a Prince Albert youth facility operated by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing.

“Incarcerated youth are deprived of their liberty and separated from their families,” Pringle said, “and youth facilities are wholly responsible for their well-being. These circumstances place a high onus on youth facilities to ensure appropriate access to health care. Sadly, this did not happen in Jordan’s case. But hopefully we can learn from his tragic death.”

“Jordan was vulnerable when in custody and this only intensified when a reasonable accommodation was not provided to ensure that he received equal protection under the law,” Pringle continued. “While not every situation can be foreseeable, all child-serving institutions must have policies and practices in place to accommodate young people with disabilities. Jordan had the right to the highest standard of health care. All Saskatchewan children and youth do.”

The report advances ten recommendations informed by the right of children and youth to care, protection and services of the highest standard. Several recommendations call on the Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing to develop a policy on the duty to accommodate and to rework their policies and procedures to ensure that they address the complex needs of youth with disabilities. As well, the Prince Albert Youth Residence (PAYR) is to develop and implement complementary local protocols and trauma-informed practices that incorporate critical thinking skills, problem solving, and systematic documentation and appropriate sharing of information on the health status of youth in their care.

The report also calls on the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General, Courts and Tribunals Division to develop a policy that speaks to non-emergency situations where youth in their care are ill or injured, and to implement protocols to improve their communication with youth facilities.

Finally, the report calls on the Agency Chiefs Child and Family Services Agency to review its practices in regard to children and youth with disabilities to ensure that they and their families are better connected to the supports and services they need, and to ensure that they respond in a timely way to requests from the youth court for assessments of the needs and circumstances of youth in conflict with the law.

“We acknowledge that the Ministry of Justice, Corrections and Policing, and the Prince Albert Youth Residence in particular, have made some significant changes since these tragic events,” Pringle said. “They have introduced a number of improvements in their youth justice policies and practices, including ensuring that youth have timely access to on-site nursing services and are no longer automatically room confined for lengthy periods of time on admission to remand or after attending court.”

The Advocate aims to prevent and reduce injuries and deaths of children and youth by providing advocacy services on their behalf, investigating critical injuries and deaths, making formal recommendations to

improve services, and speaking to situations that put children and youth at risk. Throughout his tenure, Pringle has focused on improving outcomes for children and youth, and the need to address the factors that put them at risk – poverty and its related conditions, mental illness, violence, addictions, racism, the legacy of colonialism and residential schools, and disabilities.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of 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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