

## **Advocate for Children and Youth comments on public inquest into child's death in foster care**

SASKATOON—Bob Pringle, the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, commended the work of the public inquest into Lee Bonneau's death, which concluded last Friday. "It shed new light on the circumstances that brought these children together in such a tragic way," Pringle said. "I also want to convey my condolences to the Bonneau family, and express empathy to Derek and his family."

The Advocate's May 2014 report on these developments, *Two Tragedies: Holding Systems Accountable*, did not disclose Lee's name to protect the privacy of the children and families involved. "I am now using Lee's name as his family wanted the inquest to honour him," Pringle said. "For the child known as LT at the inquest, I will continue to call him 'Derek.'"

"I'd like to thank the jury members for their worthy recommendations, and the Chief Coroner for his commitment to draw public attention to the policy and practice issues at play," Pringle said. "Our thoughts are also with the community members and first responders. They too were so deeply affected. These are traumatic events."

"The quality of casework for both boys and their families was an issue, and there were many missed opportunities to assess risk for these children, and intervene with proper supports. The inquest made clear that communication between various service providers was a problem, and that workloads often make it difficult for social workers to provide services as required by policy."

"Both our investigation and the inquest left me with many questions," said Pringle. "Why didn't Lee's mother get the support she needed to deal with her mental health challenges? Did she understand what she was signing? Why wasn't his father considered to care for him when his mother no longer could?"

"As for Derek, I still cannot understand how a child so obviously in need did not get help until after this tragedy. School staff, the RCMP and community members repeatedly raised concerns about Derek to Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services, with little effect."

Staff from the Advocate's office were in attendance throughout the inquest, and observed that several of those who testified appeared to be absolving themselves of their responsibilities to ensure children's safety. "We see similar patterns of non-compliance in many of our investigations, and we have made numerous recommendations to improve the quality of casework and compliance with policy," Pringle said.

Since the release of *Two Tragedies*, the Ministry of Social Services and Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services have been reporting quarterly to the Advocate. While Pringle is pleased with their progress responding to his recommendations in areas such as case assessments, training on risk assessment tools and communication, "there is still a long way to go."

“We remain vigilant in monitoring progress on our recommendations, and given our mandate, those of the jury as well.”

“I cannot say it often enough—we are all responsible for the care and well-being of our children,” Pringle said. “All children have the right to grow up in safe environments, and to highest level of care, no matter where they live in Saskatchewan. There is no greater way to honour the gift of our children than to ensure that they are safe, valued and respected.”

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a 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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For the Advocate’s special investigation report *Two Tragedies: Holding Systems Accountable*, please visit: [www.saskadvocate.ca](http://www.saskadvocate.ca).

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