

**Submission to Law Amendments Committee
Halifax Society for Children, Youth, and Families
17 November 2015**

RE: Bill 112, An Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 1990, the Children and Family Services Act (C.F.S.A.)

The Halifax Society for Children, Youth, and Families (hereafter C.Y.F. Halifax) is a registered not-for-profit organization that aims to raise community awareness and understanding about the needs of vulnerable children, youth, and families and to promote community activities that help to prevent child and youth maltreatment and support healthy family development.

As one of Nova Scotia's Community Child Welfare Boards (C.C.W.B.), we have closely followed and participated in the C.F.S.A. reform process as it has unfolded throughout 2015.). All members of C.Y.F. Halifax are big believers in open and honest community dialogue at all times, but especially when the changes at hand could profoundly impact some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Government and organizations like C.Y.F. Halifax have a responsibility to engage with these communities with openness, honesty, and recognition of the diversity of education/literacy levels about government processes and policies.

To help raise community awareness about the C.F.S.A. process and to help our members better understand the potential impact of the proposed changes, C.Y.F. Halifax hosted three (3) public Listening Clinics in July and August in different parts of the Halifax region (Peninsula, Dartmouth, and Spryfield). We heard a mixture of strong support for some proposed changes to the C.F.S.A., qualified support for others, and serious skepticism and/or apprehension about many others.

Above all, we heard a very large number of questions – on the legislative timeline, the rationale for change in general as well as for specific changes, and finally about the consultation process itself. Our organizational submission to government in August was a comprehensive list of the themes, questions, and concerns that arose from our Listening Clinic conversations (see attached).

To this point, C.Y.F. Halifax has not taken a position for or against the proposed amendments to the C.F.S.A.; and to be clear, we do not wish to do so now. We believe our role as a C.C.W.B. can be best fulfilled by encouraging community dialogue about the many challenges faced by children, youth, and families in the Halifax region (and throughout the province). We also believe that advocating one way or the other on most aspects of C.F.S.A. reform could detract from our ability to facilitate important conversations in the future.

With all that said, C.Y.F. Halifax joins with our fellow C.C.W.B.s across the province in congratulating Minister Joanne Bernard, her caucus colleagues, and her staff at the Department of Community Services (D.C.S.) for embarking on an ambitious change agenda that includes long overdue C.F.S.A. reform, employment support and income assistance (E.S.I.A.) reform, and other social service reforms with a focus on prevention and early intervention. We agree that significant changes are necessary and we are hopeful that the planned reforms will make a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and families served by D.C.S. across Nova Scotia.

With respect to C.F.S.A. reform (Bill 112), in particular, we also agree with many of our Listening Clinic participants that the true impact of the proposed legislative amendments will be determined after Bill 112 becomes law. We understand that the final version of the amended C.F.S.A. must then be translated into actionable policy that can be implemented by frontline D.C.S. staff.

With this in mind, we wish to express our firm belief that the community should be invited to participate in substantive dialogues with D.C.S. at the policy formation stage. C.Y.F. Halifax certainly hopes to be involved with the policy formation process ahead and we are eager to partner with government to ensure that community voices are heard and that the best interests of children, youth, and families are ultimately served in the renewed policy and programming.

Similarly, we also understand that the true impact of C.F.S.A. reform will be heavily influenced by the resources available to carry out the broader D.C.S. change agenda. Income supports, education supports, intervention services, and mental health & addiction services must be well-funded and readily available to many more children, youth, and families across Nova Scotia. Otherwise, the promise of C.F.S.A. reform and D.C.S. transformation simply cannot be fully realized. We sincerely hope that government can begin to view short-term spending on social services and supports as long-term investments in a more cohesive and more economically prosperous Nova Scotia.

Thank you for reviewing our submission.

Respectfully,

Bob Parker and DeRico Symonds
Chair and Vice Chair of C.Y.F. Halifax