



November 13, 2015

Law Amendments Committee  
Via email [legc.office@novascotia.ca](mailto:legc.office@novascotia.ca)

**Re: proposed changes to *Children and Family Services Act***

The Board of Directors of the Canadian Mental Health Association – Kings County Branch are pleased that the Province of Nova Scotia has undertaken to review and change the existing Act. We have reviewed the proposed Act, and wish to express some concerns that we have with the Act.

Overall, we feel that if the Province put enough resources into it, then the current Act would work with minor modifications. There are too few caseworkers to provide services at the current level, let alone an enhanced level. We did not see this resourcing issue addressed in the document.

We were pleased to see an attempt to close the gap in services for people 16-18 years of age; however, we are not certain that the typical youth coming through the system will be able to jump all of the hoops in the correct order and access service. Staff of our Project HOPE team (Housing Outreach and Peer Empowerment) are not confident that they would be able to help an at-risk youth navigate the barriers.

We were puzzled by the removal of daycare services as a funded intervention to support families at risk. Many of our clients have kids who have access daycare, and it has allowed for the families to learn and grow while remaining intact.

We are concerned that people with mental health issues will be unfairly stigmatized, and reluctant to come forward for help for fear of swiftly losing their children. Certainly we envision that the clause "may in the future cause harm" will force the DCS workers (and anyone in the community who deals with children) to be prognosticators and will load the dice against many of our clients, whose children are the reason that they keep trying day after day.

For the right reasons, speedy removal of children from their families is important. Bureaucratic cumulative time limits are not the right reason. Add to this the wait times for publicly funded mental health services and the stigma against chronic mental health consumers, and families will be torn apart by the strictures of this Act while attempting to access help.

Children who survive foster care with any ambition intact deserve a chance to be able to pursue a secondary education to assist them to break the cycle of poverty. If the current system is being abused, then please deal with those individuals, rather than withdrawing support for deserving young adults.

We hope that the expression of our concerns may guide changes to the Act before it is finalized.

Anne Pettigrew  
Chair, Board of Directors

Copies to:

The Honourable Joanne Bernard, Minister of Community Services

The Honourable Allan MacMaster, Critic for Justice and Attorney General

The Honourable Leo Glavine, Minister of Health & Wellness, MLA Kings West

The Honourable Diana Whalen, Minister for Justice and Attorney General

Janet Nearing, Department of Community Services

Larry Harrison, Critic for Community Services, MLA Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley

Chris d'Entremont, Critic for Health & Wellness

John Lohr, MLA Kings North

Keith Irving, MLA Kings South