



**Legislative  
Committees Office**  
House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

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September 27, 2016

Honourable Joanne Bernard  
Minister  
Department of Community Services  
PO Box 696  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2T7

Dear Minister Bernard:

**Re: Standing Committee on Community Services**

The Standing Committee on Community Services had met with the Cape Breton – Victoria Child Advocacy Society on Tuesday, September 20, 2016 regarding the child welfare system in Nova Scotia and in particular the establishment of a Child Advocacy Office in Nova Scotia.

As was reported, there is currently no child advocacy office in Nova Scotia. Most provinces in Canada does have one, in particular eight of them that have been outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is a division of the Nova Scotia Ombudsman’s Office that deals with issues involving youth, children and families, however, the Cape Breton-Victoria Child Advocacy Board and the 11 child welfare boards as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recommends the establishment of strong children’s commissioners or child advocacy offices.

After much discussion, the following motion was put:

“The Standing Committee on Community Services requests the Department of Community Services and the Minister of Community Services to look into best practices from the eight provinces, conduct a review of the impact that this would have on the children in our communities; and report back in a reasonable timeline, six months maximum. Also that the department review the Private Member’s Bill that was presented by Minister Churchill, and to also look at finding the right person to do this job, and also striking up a committee to review this from all three Parties making sure that all three Parties have an equal voice in this”.

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For your information, the meeting transcript can be found on-line at the following address:  
[http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee\\_hansard/C6/cs2016sep20](http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/committees/committee_hansard/C6/cs2016sep20).

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Darlene Henry* for

Ms. Patricia Arab, MLA  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Community Services

cc: Committee Members and witnesses



Community Services · Services communautaires  
Office of the Minister · Bureau du ministre

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OCT 13 2016

Ms. Patricia Arab, MLA  
Chair,  
Standing Committee on Community Services  
Legislative Committees Office  
House of Assembly  
PO Box 2630, Station M  
Halifax, NS B3J 3P7

Dear Ms. Arab:

Thank you for your letter of September 27, 2016 regarding the Committee's meeting with the Cape Breton – Victoria Child Advocacy Society regarding the child welfare system in Nova Scotia and, in particular, the establishment of a Child Advocacy Office in Nova Scotia.

The initial portion of your request that "...the Department of Community Services and the Minister of Community Services look into best practices from the eight provinces" is something that I am confident can be initiated and completed by our Department.

A jurisdictional scan of this nature could help inform a review on potential impact establishing a Child Advocacy Office would have on the children in our communities. A Child Advocacy Office would be accountable for all children and youth and is not limited to children and youth involved with the Department of Community Services. As such, a review of this nature would also require the involvement of many governmental departments, including Health and Wellness, Education, and Justice.

The motion put forward by the Standing Committee on Community Services in relation to this matter requires careful consideration and collaboration across Departments in order to undertake the review recommended by the Standing Committee.

Respectfully,

Hon. Joanne Bernard, BA, MA  
Minister

16 November 2016.

Ms. Patricia Arab, Chair ,  
Standing Committee on Community Services,  
c/o Darlene Henry, Clerk,  
Standing Committee on Community Services,  
P.O.Box 2630, Station M,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3P7.  
darlene.henry@novascotia.ca

Dear Ms. Arab:

Thank you for your letter of 23 September to the Face of Poverty Consultation. It has been reviewed at two meetings of Face of Poverty Consultation. We are pleased to know that the Standing Committee on Community Services has received a response from the Department of Community Services to the questions that arose following presentations at the June 2016 special meeting of the Standing Committee.

It is not clear to us that the other members of the Standing Committee were made aware of our 23 September 2016 letter addressed to the Chair of the Standing Committee. We would appreciate clarification on this matter.

Information that the Face of Poverty Consultation is aware of suggests that much confusion remains around the criteria for the provision of special needs allowances and that many persons who are in receipt of Income Assistance (IA) are still not receiving all the benefits they require - benefits which reflect the law and the United Nations' declarations on human rights.

With respect to the information that you have provided on funds available for housing we would seek more detail on how much of this is actually new money in 2016-2017, and how much, if any, has actually been spent, and where, precisely.

We continue to be concerned that the necessary changes in the transformation of the ESIA policies within the Department are very slow in coming. Many Nova Scotians are still homeless and hungry and unable to obtain all the supports they need from the Department.

It is our expectation that the Department will be able to meet with the Standing Committee very early in the new year to make a report on progress in the transformation process. It is our hope that the Department will also report that the provincial budget for 2017-2018 will reflect changes in policies with an increase in benefits such that all Nova Scotians dependent on ESIA will be able to provide for themselves and their families in a timely and appropriate manner.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Yours truly,

Jane Cushing, Corresponding Secretary,  
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