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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Legislative Affairs

Chairperson
Shannon Corbett
Constituency of Transcona



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Third Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
Tuesday, December 16, 2025

TIME – 10 a.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – MLA Shannon Corbett (Transcona)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface)

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Min. Fontaine

*Ms. Byram, MLAs Compton, Corbett, Loiselle,
Mrs. Stone*

APPEARING:

Sherry Gott, Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth

*Alison Carrey Bilous, Senior Policy Analyst,
Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Ms. Melanie Ching): Good morning. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

MLA Carla Compton (Tuxedo): I nominate MLA Corbett.

Clerk Assistant: MLA Corbett has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Corbett, will you please take the Chair.

The Chairperson: Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

MLA Compton: I nominate MLA Loiselle.

The Chairperson: MLA Loiselle has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, MLA Loiselle has been elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone that questions and comments must be put through the Chair using third person as opposed to directly to members and representatives.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this morning?

MLA Robert Loiselle (St. Boniface): I was hoping to start with an hour and then revisit after an hour.

The Chairperson: Okay. It has been suggested that we sit for one hour. Agreed? And then revisit, sorry.

Agreed? [*Agreed*]

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement, and would she please introduce the officials in attendance.

Hon. Nahanni Fontaine (Minister of Families): I do.

The Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister.

MLA Fontaine: Good morning, folks. Good morning, committee. With me today is Alex Krosney, my chief of staff; Michelle Dubik, our deputy minister; and Tina Moody with child welfare.

I'll keep my comments very brief. I want to just say miigwech to all of the leadership at MACY and— for being here today for an important discussion.

We've had some good meetings. I know that my team has been at your offices having some discussions with your whole team. I think that from what I understand, those have gone really well.

I'm glad that our team is able to kind of come and spend some time with you folks at MACY.

Congratulations on the new office space. I think everybody's really looking forward to that. I know that that was a long time coming, and anybody that sat on LAMC will know how long that took to get that office space. So I want to just acknowledge that that's quite an accomplishment and I think that that new space will help, you know, really enhance the work, the really important work that you do. So I just want to say congratulations on that and then, again, a profound miigwech to you and every single one of your team.

It's been a busy year. As folks know, we've had some legislative changes which, you know, ensure that we have a legislative framework that is moving Manitoba towards jurisdiction, towards First Nations and Métis asserting jurisdiction over child welfare. I'm proud of the work that we're doing in that—in the department in respect to that work.

I think, as I've said many, many times, that is transformative work. It is—it's going to be a long path to full jurisdiction. That's going to take years and years, but as I often say: Child welfare in Manitoba is incredibly unique. And I know that the advocate will know this, that across the country, Manitoba's structure of child welfare looks very, very differently and is very unique than other jurisdictions and territories across the country.

And right now we're working with well over 20 First Nations and the Métis who are on the path of asserting jurisdiction, and we have about five First Nations that are on the cusp of asserting jurisdiction, and so we're very excited about that and we're hoping that some are—actually very, very soon—that we'll be able to sign some of those co-ordination agreements.

And why I share that is because I think that's a reflection of the journey of child welfare in Manitoba starting and, you know, going back to 2004 and well beyond that in the AJI and AJIC, where you had Indigenous leadership really advocating and fighting for some form of jurisdiction. And, of course, we know that in Manitoba we have devolution. I think devolution was supposed to begin—be that beginning path moving us to full jurisdiction, and we're well on the way of doing that work.

As the advocate knows, we also proclaimed kinship and customary care agreements, which is a different way of doing child welfare, but fundamentally it's about ensuring that children stay with their families, in their communities and ensuring that we're—you know, we're moving away from apprehension and more for looking at ensuring that families

are kept together and that there's agreement in that, and that parents don't lose their parental rights.

So, slowly but surely, we're moving towards the path of asserting jurisdiction. As I've said many, many times, it's going to take a while, it's going to look differently. Every First Nation is going to pursue this differently within their Indigenous laws, but our government is committed to doing that work, and we're also committed to working with MACY to continue the good work of collaboration in respect of children's rights and the services that they are entitled to receive in Manitoba.

And then I would be remiss—I just want to give a quick shout-out, we just—I think that was like two weeks ago we had the official signing ceremony at transferring The Link over to Brokenhead Ojibway First Nation. And BON is also well on their way to asserting jurisdiction, and so it made sense that The Link approached BON to look at transferring those services and that service infrastructure. And so you have a wide spectrum of work that's going on in Manitoba moving towards asserting jurisdiction at the service level, at the First Nation level and at the government level.

* (10:10)

So I just want to say miigwech and I look forward to the conversation today.

The Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister.

Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

Ms. Jodie Byram (Agassiz): Can you hear me, first of all?

The Chairperson: Yes. Go ahead.

Ms. Byram: My apologies for not being there in person today, but I'm grateful that we have the technology that allows me to be—participate virtually.

I'm just going to keep my remarks very short so that we can get to the conversations that we've gathered for today.

First of all, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the office of MACY, and particularly to Sherry Gott and her team, that works hard behind the scenes to protect children and youth here and advocate for them. I know that that job can be incredibly challenging. The stories you must hear and the work that you do, it can be very emotionally taxing and carry a heavy burden at times, I'm sure. I deeply

respect your commitment to the work that you do and I want to say thank you to that.

The recent report is done very well. It illustrates the significant work that your office has been doing and the advocacy that you are out there for the children and gives us clear and insightful demonstration or illustration, I should say, to the work that you do.

I also want to highlight the efforts that your office has brought forward, or the—bringing forward concerns that you have in the last couple of years. I look forward to learning more about what your office does, some of the challenges that you are seeing, but also some of the excess—success stories and I look forward to hearing some of what that looks like for you.

I know there's been recent changes regarding the transfer of jurisdiction. I'm curious and interested to learn a little bit more about what your office is hearing in regards to that. And again, I appreciate the dedication and your work that you do to advocate for the children and youth here in our province of Manitoba.

So, with that, I know there's many questions that I have regarding the report and the work that is done, so that will conclude my opening remarks thus far.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: We thank the member. Just a reminder to address your comments through the Chair moving forward, please.

Do the representatives from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth wish to make an opening statement? Please proceed.

Ms. Sherry Gott (Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth): Thank you.

Swampy Cree spoken

Tansi. Kinanâskomitinawaw.

Wapiski Asineesis Eskwe' nit-isinihkason. Sapotaweyak ne-na -oche. Kis ken tum meena gi me ni ga soon. Akas Takonow.

Translation

Hello. Thank you; I'm grateful for all of you.

My spirit name is White Little Stones Woman who carries an Arrow. I was also given the name Knowing. I am from Sapotaweyak Cree Nation.

English

Thank you.

Good morning. I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs for the opportunity to appear today. My name is Sherry Gott and I am the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, known as MACY.

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge that the mandate of MACY extends across the province of Manitoba. Our offices are located on Treaty 1 and Treaty 5 territories. We live and work on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Cree, Dakota and Dene people. We also live on the national homeland of the Red River Métis.

We acknowledge that northern Manitoba includes the lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We are here today to discuss the contents of our 2024-25 annual report which was released on October 29, 2025.

Before I provide more details, I'd like to introduce my team who are here with me today: Kelly Gossfeld is the Indigenous deputy advocate responsible for advocacy services, youth engagement, finance and administration; Rachel Charette, who is a new member of ours; she is the deputy Manitoba advocate responsible for research, quality assurance, investigation and public education; Lauren Prince, who's directly behind me, is our new Indigenous cultural worker; and Alison Bilous is our senior policy analyst, sitting with me here within our quality assurance team.

At MACY, children's rights are at the forefront of everything we do. Our guide is—our work is guided by the United Nations convention rights of the child, known as UNCRC. This is recognized in our legislation, The Advocate for Children and Youth Act, or ACYA, which is proclaimed in 2018.

For the past seven years, we have been advocating in the following eight domain areas: Child and Family Services, adoptions, disabilities, mental health, youth addictions, youth education, youth justice and victim support services, which includes domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

As the annual report highlights, our office responded to 3,018 requests for advocacy services last fiscal year, which represents an eight–6 per cent increase from the year before; 81 per cent of these requests are resolved by advocating with young people by advising them of their rights and services available to them, and by empowering youth to be their own self advocate.

We opened 448 ongoing advocacy cases where the social referrals enquiry required long-term supports or more complex interventions. The children and youth represented in those cases experienced systemic concerns related to victimization, mental health, school absenteeism, domestic violence, placement instability and neural developmental disability.

On average, advocacy cases remain open for four months in total; 83 per cent of the children and youth we supported through advocacy services were Indigenous. The systemic advocacy specialist focused on strategic response planning and stakeholder engagement in critical areas such as youth addictions, expanding access to respite services for children with disabilities, addressing gaps in health-care access for children with refugee status and promoting equitable mental health supports for children and youth with FASD and autism.

In addition, the specialist works alongside the quality assurance and research teams to produce a special report, *Innagakeyaa Bimadizewin (Towards the Good Life): Unifying Voices for Youth Addiction System Change*, released in November 2024.

The report amplifies the voices of young people who use substances and have first-hand experience with the youth addiction system as well as the profound insights of those service providers working tirelessly to support them. Taking together the views, expertise and experiences contained within the reports sheds awareness of some of the current problem within the youth addiction system, as well as possibilities for transforming it to better serve the children and youth for which it is intended.

In the last fiscal year, we received 206 formal child death notifications and there were 86 child death reviews completed. These reviews identified systemic concerns that are highlighted in the annual report. Suicide continues to be a leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 20 in Manitoba, with 18 reported last fiscal.

We must do better for young people across the province. One of the purposes of child death reviews is to identify and analyze recurring circumstances and trends to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of reviewable services.

A recurring trend that we're concerned about and monitoring is caregiver needs and well-being. Over the last two years, our office reviewed a number of cases where caregivers' mental health or addictions

directly impacted the safety of children, and in some instances, resulted in child death. When caregivers do not get the support and resources they need, parenting capacity is impacted and young people are left at risk.

A mental health and addictions strategy that encompasses the needs of all Manitobans is essential to fulfilling young people's right to survive and develop in the best way possible, and it's government's responsibility to ensure it. Another ongoing concern that we see across the programs in my office is the number of young people presenting with complex trauma and needs. These young people are among some of the most vulnerable citizens in Manitoba and are at the highest risk of harm or death.

Despite services provided, relentless efforts advocating on their behalf, young people in Manitoba continue to face significant gaps in accessing the specialized services that they desperately need and are entitled to. Their families and service providers are being left with a difficult choice between seeking specialized placement resources outside the province or remaining in Manitoba where resources are failing to meet their needs.

These exceptionally vulnerable youth will continue to be at risk while they wait for culturally safe, specialized placements. The serious injury program continues to see increases in reporting as the awareness of the program and reporting requirements expand across reviewable services.

* (10:20)

In 2024-25, the team received 273 referrals, of which 160 were considered in scope for review. The team completed 95 reports and Indigenous children, youth and young adults who were represented in 88 per cent of those injuries. The most common injuries involved drug and alcohol, head injury, penetrating wounds and sexual assault. Similar to the systemic issues we've seen in child death and advocacy, housing insecurity and disruption to their access to education were prevalent in these reports.

It is clear this program and across MACY that young people in Manitoba continue to face complex co-occurring issues. Without youth-specific strategies to address these support gaps, we will continue to jeopardize the safety and well-being of vulnerable people in Manitoba. This is unacceptable.

This past year, youth engagement co-ordinators carried a—carried out a diverse range of public education engagement and outreach initiatives throughout the province. The youth engagement team connected

with 71 youth-serving organizations to promote child and youth rights and raise awareness of MACY. This allowed them to reach 3,007 youth and including 29 outreach initiatives where the primary audience was youth. The youth engagement team also continue to work on a peer-to-peer research project and laid the groundwork for another UNCRC mural, which is set to be unveiled in 2026.

The team, alongside the Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad, was invited to participate in a conference hosted by the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Last year, the public education team launched a TikTok account in an effort to reach more young people. The account features a variety of videos highlighting MACY's community involvement, children's rights and issues and more. The team also led our first-ever digital awareness campaign. In just 10 days we saw promising results. We reached more than 600,000 accounts on Meta platforms and YouTube for a total of nearly 940,000 impressions.

We are also working to increase visibility in the North, and have added visibility through signage and ads in the Thompson centre city mall, airport and community centre.

This past year, the research team worked on a special report, *Shifting the Lens: understanding and confronting inequities in sleep-related infant deaths*. The report is an up-to-date—updated to this 2020 safe sleep report, and stresses the sleep—stresses that sleep-related deaths cannot be understood in isolation from conditions in which they occur.

The Chairperson: The representative's time is up.

Do we have leave for the representative to continue to finish her report? *[Agreed]*

Please proceed.

Ms. Gott: The team also supported work on two statements of concern, one related to sexual exploitation and the other one to youth addiction services. This work on addiction services also supported a special report on the topic.

Collaboration is key to the research team, and they are highly involved in nearly all projects at MACY. The quality assurance teams continue to work on updating MACY's recommendation monitoring model this fiscal. This includes several consultations with government departments, elders, youth and other organizations to ensure we are operating in a good way.

Some other highlights of the quality assurance team include the completion of an office-wide policy and procedures manual, updated recommendations and implementation sheets to allow—to align with the new recommendation monitoring model, an input on seven office-wide projects where QA support and analysis or leadership was provided.

Following the formal review of The Advocate for Children and Youth Act by the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs, MACY participated in a working group with internal government representatives from the Department of Families. The intention of this working group was to discuss the proposed amendments of ACYA and put forward by MACY for the purpose of creating legislative proposal.

This work is incredibly meaningful to our office. We do have concerns about how lengthy the process has been so far and would like to see action in the future. We look forward to continued consultation and public engagement on proposed amendments and are hopeful to their adoption, which would strengthen the advocate's mandate for upholding the rights and interests of young people in Manitoba.

In conclusion, I hope each of you will take the time to read this report and gain more fulsome understanding of the issues young people in Manitoba face and the important work of our office—does to address them. We work every day in support of the rights of young people, and this work cannot be—cannot happen without collaboration between our offices and your government.

We take this privilege very seriously and hold this work close to our hearts.

Ekosi.

I now welcome questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you to the representative.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Byram: Good morning. I want to say thank you for the opening remarks from the office of MACY. It's highlighted some of the challenges but also some of the successes. And I can appreciate the report; I've read through it a number of times and do have some questions in relation to that.

I'll start off with—in the very beginning where it illustrates a little bit of the executive summary, it talks about 30 updated recommendations. I'm just wondering if the advocate can expand on some of those recommendations and if there would be a top five that they would consider being a priority right now. *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Sorry. I need to recognize you.

Ms. Gott, please proceed.

Ms. Gott: Thank you. Sorry.

Currently we have five reports that we're looking at that we released in the past few years: Shifting the Lens, safe sleep; Eishia Hudson's report; the intimate partner violence report and the disability report.

So I can't highlight five recommendations at this point because we have five reports that we're reviewing and monitoring through our new recommendation model.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Minister? *[interjection]* No, okay.

Ms. Byram: Thank you for that.

Moving forward, just given the essence of time, we're going to be a little short; I have a—quite a number of questions. Looking at the services that are provided, are you—with the change of jurisdiction, are you seeing children and youth falling through the cracks, and how are you able to navigate that when you don't have any oversight to assist in some of that? *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Ms. Gott.

Ms. Gott: Sorry.

Thank you for that question.

We continue to receive calls from a certain community, and we continue to redirect those calls to their own agency. However, we are—you know, we don't—we take calls from all youth in Manitoba, and we don't—we listen to their concerns and we advocate to the best of our ability.

And as far as oversight, we have no jurisdiction under bill C-92, although we still get calls from the one certain agency. But like I said, we have—we've met with the minister and we've been redirected to direct those calls back to that agency so the elders council can deal with the youth that are calling, you know.

* (10:30)

It's—I think, you know, we—as bill C-92 becomes—comes roll—starts to roll out, more likely we'll get more calls, but at the same time we are willing to work with anybody that calls us and we have been meeting with some agencies to talk about an MOU to ensure that service delivery is being met and that children's needs are being met.

So this week, actually, we are meeting with a community to discuss how we can support them and we support jurisdiction, by the way. I think Indigenous children deserve to be supported by their own communities.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

MLA Fontaine: Yes, I just want to respond to what the opposition critic is peddling here at the standing committee.

I think it's incredibly important to recognize again the colonial narrative that members opposite continue to bring forward in respect of jurisdiction. And the member consistently and routinely brings up that because First Nations and Métis are pursuing and attempting to assert jurisdiction, that children are more at risk than what is a colonial system of child welfare. And the member continues to fight to uphold this colonial system.

So I want to be very clear here, and there's a particular First Nation, the only First Nation that has jurisdiction in Manitoba where their law, their Indigenous law, has paramountcy over federal law and provincial law: that law has a system of oversight. It goes from the agency to the board of directors to the elders council and to chief and council.

So they have two added layers—they have two layers of oversight and from what I understand they're contemplating a third layer of oversight. So I know that the member is fighting so hard to uphold this colonial system, but I want to be very clear that First Nations and Métis governments have their children's human rights and security at the heart of the work that they do.

My hope is that, you know, the members opposite will educate themselves on what bill C-92 is, what Indigenous law is and actually how it's going to make child welfare better. So I want to just clarify: I know she wants to uphold the system. That's her prerogative, but it's very important that people have the facts.

I also just want to share, as well, MACY has the opportunity to do two things with Indigenous governing bodies: they have an opportunity to, and the advocate did mention, MOUs. They have the opportunity to share information jointly. If there's an investigation they can collaborate with a First Nation or a Métis government that has jurisdiction.

And then they can also enter into agreements to review provincial services. They don't have the legislative framework right now to review any Indigenous law services, but they certainly can enter into agreements with any IGBs to review provincial services. So I just want to clarify that for the member.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Honourable Minister Fontaine.

Any further questions, Ms. Byram?

Ms. Byram: So I just want to clarify, too, that I am hearing directly from families that are impacted with some of these challenges. We've heard from the member from The Pas, we're hearing from the advocate that there are some concerns coming forward. So I just want to make the minister aware that I'm not just creating this.

I'm wanting to ask the advocate here if they can share with me how many kids has the office of MACY had to redirect elsewhere in the last number of years because they don't have oversight or they don't have jurisdiction or authority.

Ms. Gott: I can say that 2 per cent of our calls have been—we received from independent agencies, but we continue to try and support those children that call us. And they're—2 per cent of 300–3,000 is not very many, but at the same time, you know, we continue to hear those concerns. So our focus is to make sure the rights of children and youth are at the forefront of everything we do. So there is space, as the minister mentioned, for us to enter into a MOU with agencies that call us with—especially with independent agencies.

So thank you.

MLA Fontaine: I just want to correct what the member just said again, even though I just put this on the official record. Again, she continues to peddle a narrative that's not true; it's not accurate. She just said in her question to the advocate: because they don't have oversight.

I just laid out for the member that Peguis, as an Indigenous governing body, has two oversight mechanisms and are currently contemplating a third oversight mechanism.

I also just want to clarify for the member that right now, in Manitoba, we only have one IGB; we only have one Indigenous governing body, and that happens to be Peguis who has two oversight mechanisms, which includes an elders council. So what the member is putting—and, again, peddling—on the official record

is that an elders council somehow isn't equipped and isn't able to deal with some of the concerns that may present themselves.

So again, I know the member and members opposite want to uphold the colonial system and—but, you know, I don't know where that member has been in the last 20 years when there was concerns about children's safety in the current system.

So again, every time the member gets up and she continues to peddle inaccurate information, I will continue to correct the record.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Honourable Minister Fontaine.

Ms. Byram: Okay. We're here to talk to MACY about some of the work that they are doing, and MACY doesn't have oversight on some of these First Nation communities.

Moving forward, I am—in the report, it indicates that there's 42 per cent related challenges in life, survival and development for youth. I'm wondering, Madam Chair, if the advocate can elaborate on specific factors contributing to these challenges that these youth chaired or that the MACY recognizes.

Ms. Gott: Most of our calls are assessed by our advocacy officers. So they categorize through—when they assess those calls, they categorize through the UNCRC on whether or not that right is being met.

* (10:40)

And 42 per cent of those calls, some of those are access to the social worker; are they—you, know, are they able to access and talk to them. Some of them call to ensure that their voice is heard. There's issues of placements. We try our best to support these youth when they call us and especially with concerns with their case plans or anything like that. So that's how we come to this conclusion at 42 per cent. That's how we assess which right is affected.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: You mentioned issues of placements. Can you expand on that, elaborate what that—what you see or what you've been hearing?

The Chairperson: Ms. Gott.

Ms. Gott: We know—

The Chairperson: Oops. Sorry. Ms. Gott.

Ms. Gott: Sorry. Okay. We know that there is lack of placements in the system, especially specialized placements.

Children with complex issues and complex trauma have difficulty in accessing placements of that nature. We know that, you know, the system is lacking EPR shelters; we know that. And so, you know, we continue to ensure that these—the children's needs are met in those placements, if they find one.

So I think that, you know, with us, we continue to receive those types of calls. So I don't know what else I can say on that, but other than, you know, this has been a long systemic issue; it's not just new. It's been—even when I was doing the field—working in the field way back when, we had those issues. So I know that kinship care and all that is happening and that's a good move, right, because children deserve to be raised by their families.

So thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: We also heard from Chief Dr. Stanley Bird with concerns in resources being available and other concerns in relation to jurisdictional transition.

I'm just wondering if the office of the advocate is hearing some more of these concerns and are they—do they feel that the supports and the resources are in place in these communities where children are being placed?

Ms. Gott: Our offices continue to hear concerns regarding the Manitoba agency that is operating as an independent, much to the same frequency as—which we were hearing concerns prior to their independence. Our focus is on ensuring the rights of children are met and are at the forefront.

So whichever entity is providing services to children and youth in Manitoba or anywhere in Canada the rights of children and youth need to be considered and be at the forefront. There is space in the paradigm being created by bill C-92 and the move to independence for federal—for a federal advocate or other entity who will continue to advocate for children's rights that are being impacted by the system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: Thank you for that. And this leads me into my next question here and the advocacy that the office does. And the report mentions expanding access to respite services for children with disabilities

and collaborating with the Children's Coalition, and I'm just wondering if we can hear a little bit more about what the office is doing to promote equitable health supports for children and youth with FASD and autism.

Ms. Gott: One of the things in our office is we have a systemic advocacy specialist that works with—alongside agencies and organizations that work with children with disabilities and she continues to collect that data and to ensure that those needs are addressed.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

MLA Fontaine: I will also just put on the record here, for the purpose of the committee and for the purpose of the critic's information, that we did extend Children's disABILITY Services on reserve, including children's home-care services on reserve as well. So families with children with disabilities can now have access to the provincial infrastructure that we have in Families to support them as they navigate that system.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Ms. Byram: So just following up on that, the office of MACY has done some good reports. We've seen them for a number of years, and one of those reports was Bridging the Gaps.

Can the office of the advocate tell me where things are at with those nine recommendations in the Bridging the Gaps report? What is the status of implementation of those?

Ms. Gott: We have been working through our new compliance model to ensure that those recommendations are being met, and we just recently received the work from the department. So we're pleased at what we're seeing right now in response to those recommendations, so we will be releasing our report some time this year, this next fiscal.

So that work is ongoing.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: Thank you for that, and in the essence of time here, again, I'm going to move on to a different section here.

So looking through the previous year's reports, it looks like MACY's changed how the death reviews are reported on, I guess. Years ago there was much more detail in that—how it was reported in this, and it's changed in the last number of years. I'm just wondering if the advocate can expand on why some of that has changed.

Ms. Gott: I think I'm going to ask you—what specifically has changed; I don't think we've changed anything. The child death reviews are assessed by our child death unit, and our reports are the same and we haven't changed anything at this point. So I'd like to know what specifically you are referring to.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: Sorry, I maybe wasn't clear on that. So looking back to other years, where it gives the natural—it breaks down what the natural cause of death was and, like, for example, the accidental, it breaks it down to motor vehicle, drowning, in-home and other—a much more detailed scope of cause of death. And it no longer gives those details. I'm just wondering if there's a reason why that has changed.

Ms. Gott: So, when you look at our data on page 28 of our annual report, we used to break down the manner of death. But since we've aggregated all our data, we have decided this was the best way to report our manner of deaths, and these are the five—when you look at these, there's—these are the five main ones that we report on, and I think that it was—we found that it was better to do it that way rather than identifying, you know, if a child died naturally of a disease. I think it's better and respectful to do it this way.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

* (10:50)

Ms. Byram: Thank you for explaining that.

So although the total number of deaths has decreased, thank goodness, but we're seeing an increase over the last number of years of those that are undetermined. I'm just wondering if there is—if the advocate's office is seeing what those undetermined deaths are, or are they concerned about seeing the increase of those deaths?

Ms. Gott: First of all, I want to acknowledge that even one child death is too many.

So these numbers ebb and flow, and there are likely a variety of factors at play. We would like to see the numbers continue to decrease. This can be achieved through strategy, policies and community supports that are responsive to the needs of young people.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: Are you concerned by the—I guess, do you see where there's a trend in the undetermined number of deaths, where it's increasing? Do you have an explanation that you can share with us?

The Chairperson: Just a reminder to please pose your questions through the Chair.

Ms. Gott: So once again, I want to talk—I want to repeat myself. You know, those numbers ebb and flow, and so—and mostly children zero to two have not yet been—determined the type of death because there hasn't been an autopsy performed; and also those deaths are determined by the OCME's Office.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: I will hand this next question over to my colleague.

Mrs. Lauren Stone (Midland): In your remarks, you had—the advocate had mentioned that 2 per cent of individuals had reached out from the community that has their own jurisdiction. So I'm curious of how many ended up becoming repeat calls.

So of those individuals that had reached out and were then redirected to their own authority, how many then reached back out to your office again?

Ms. Gott: Thank you for that question.

I can tell you that we don't have those numbers right now at this moment but, you know, I continue to say to you that, yes, we do get calls from the community and we redirect them back. And I can't answer your question at this point, but if you want I could get those numbers for you.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: I know the advocate discussed some of what they are doing to get youth engaged and do some outreach programming in different areas. Can she expand on what that looks like, where these programs are being delivered and who is delivering those programs?

Ms. Gott: We have two youth engagement co-ordinators that are overseen by a program manager and that are also overseen by a deputy advocate. So we also have a Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad that does activities. There's 12 members at this point, and we always do intakes with respect to that to ensure that's—there's representation from youth that have lived experience, that have skills in the areas of making recommendations to our office to improve service delivery for the kids.

They participate in presentations, workshops, community organizations, social media. So they—when they, when the Youth Ambassador Advisory Squad

talks to us, they talk about Nothing About Us Without Us. It speaks to their right to be heard and to be included in the development of plans that affect them.

So youth in Manitoba understand that the biggest issues facing our province at this point is they have ideas and solutions to address them. So young people play a critical part at MACY; they provide that connection and world experience, and they provide insight to our programs and reports. They speak at conferences, and they connect with youth across the province.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: Thank you for expanding a little bit on that.

And just to help build off of that, is there other programs that you could want to implement but you maybe need other resources for and maybe to help reach more kids or get them different information? And what is it that you would need to help sort of do that extra bit of outreach? *[interjection]*

The Chairperson: Ms. Gott.

Ms. Gott: Sorry. Like I said, some of the things that the youth participate in is—along with our staff, which we're really proud of—every year on November 20, we have our National Child Day. This year we went to East Selkirk school where over 300 youth participated, and there's a mural project that's coming up which they worked with local artists to develop a new mural, and it's beautiful. Once it comes out, it—and unveiled I think it'll be received very well.

They also provided support to the Peer-to-Peer research project. They also—we would like to also develop a program in the North, especially, you know, with all the lack of resources in the North for youth. We want to be able to be at the forefront of that work. And right now we have an ongoing addictions project—Bridging the Gaps, I think it's called—or agenda gap—agenda? Something like that. And—but anyway, our systemic advocate is going up there to work with youth to develop—to help develop our youths—work on our youth addictions project that we've been working on for the past couple of years.

The Chairperson: We are coming near the hour time that we had decided upon.

What is the will of the committee?

Mrs. Stone: I recommend we sit for another 30 minutes and then reassess from there.

The Chairperson: Okay. Agreed? Oh, sorry. So the will of the committee is to sit for another 30 minutes.

Is that agreed upon? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Byram: So the minister had mentioned multiple communities who are expected to assert jurisdiction, and I'm just wondering if any of those communities have reached out to build off of the experiences of the advocate, and who is the expert in this and has some insight to some of the concerns. And that is my question.

Ms. Gott: Well, I could say that 83 per cent of our advocacy contacts are Indigenous youth; so disproportionately they're represented. The youth are—Indigenous youth are represented all—in all service areas in Manitoba, which is a legacy of colonization, intergenerational trauma and systemic racism. We hope when bill C-92 is fully enacted that the numbers of Indigenous people requiring advocacy would reduce over time, as this would be a sign that the system and supports are working as intended to support young people and their families.

So, ultimately, MACY has a mandate under a wide variety of government services. We put the rights of children, youth and young adults at the forefront of what we do.

I must also mention at this point we have other domain areas that we work in. The majority of our work is under child welfare, but we will be further doing work in the areas of disabilities, mental health, youth addictions, youth education, youth justice, victim services, which includes domestic violence and sexual exploitation.

* (11:00)

So we want to increase our work in that area because most of our work is child-welfare focused and there is other areas that we are mandated to work in or legislated.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

MLA Fontaine: I just want to respond to the critic's last comments again.

Once again, I'm not sure if the critic is, like, doing it on purpose. I mean, I would imagine that the critic's doing it on purpose to continue to peddle—or maybe she doesn't know, which is, you know, could be the reality as well.

But the language that she continues to use implicitly implies that Indigenous people don't have the expertise, the capacity, the care or the knowledge

on how to care for our children. In her last comment she said, you know, has any of the First Nations that are currently on the path to jurisdiction reached out to MACY because MACY is the experts.

I agree: MACY is an expert on a lot of things. But that comment alone implicitly implied that First Nations are not experts in what their families need, in what their children need, in what their communities need and have no capacity at establishing their own Indigenous law.

So I—you know, I would again implore and caution the member opposite that when you continue—when those—that type of narrative continues to be utilized, it creates a division and it continues to build on what people already think about Indigenous people, what people already believe about Indigenous people, which contributes to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in CFS.

So again, Indigenous people, First Nations people, Métis people are the experts in our own lives. We know what our children need. There's never been a moment in our history, except for now, where there's been a legislative framework for Indigenous people to assert control over child welfare. That exists now and the member continues to try to uphold to a colonial system rather than support the path to jurisdiction.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Ms. Byram: No community has the expertise like MACY does, and I've been hearing from families from across Manitoba with concerns and children that are being affected in child welfare across Manitoba.

So I'm just going to move forward here. Regarding quality assurance that MACY does, it states in the report that, and I'm going to quote this: A critical aspect of the quality assurance team's work also involves tracking and evaluating how government departments respond to and act upon recommendation issues by the Manitoba advocate through investigations and special reports.

So my question is: Who sees that evaluation and what is done with the information? Is it implemented or discussed internally? What happens to all that captured data?

Ms. Gott: I would like to ask Ms. Bilous to answer this question.

Ms. Alison Carrey Bilous (Senior Policy Analyst, Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth): So for the last few years, we have been updating our recommendation monitoring model and strategy.

We had put a pause on asking the government to respond to recommendations for approximately two years—or a year and a half, and we most recently received their most recent responses to the open recommendations that we currently have.

So when we receive those responses we do an internal analysis to see how that work is meeting the intent of that recommendation. And our plans for that in the future will be to collaborate with government departments, their analysts, to understand how that work is moving forward; whether or not that recommendation is moving forward in a good way. And we may do public reports in the future to talk about how those recommendations are or are not meeting their intent.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Bilous.

MLA Fontaine: I just want to clarify again, once again, what the opposition critic put on the record. In her—she started that last question by saying no First Nation community has the expertise of MACY.

Does the critic realize what she's just said is that none of the teachers have expertise, that are also contributing to Indigenous law; Chief and Council doesn't have expertise; the elders in the community don't have expertise; the matriarchs in the community don't have expertise; social services in the community don't have expertise?

That's what the member is putting on the official record. I want to be explicitly clear that every First Nation and Métis government that is pursuing jurisdiction has engaged with those experts in their community: the matriarchs, the teachers, the social services, Chief and Council, elders, youth, children. They're all contributing to the development of their Indigenous laws. And what the member just said is that none of those people have any expertise in the development of their Indigenous law.

Again, once again, I hope the critic will do better in the language that she continues to peddle.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Ms. Byram: I will pass the floor over to my colleague.

Mrs. Stone: As we see time and time again, when this minister wants to avoid accountability and difficult questions, she resorts to name-calling, mudslinging and bullying within this committee room, as we often see within Chamber.

We have every right to ask questions; Manitoba is going through a major transformational change.

Clearly, there are challenges that have been brought up not by us, but our—but by the very people that are being impacted by this transformational change.

So I'll just read a public quote from an SCO news release from Chief Dr. Stanley Bird, which said, and I quote: The agreement has failed; it does not protect children, it does not meet the basic standards of safety, accountability or transparency.

This is why we're here today: to ask some questions about this major transformational change that Manitoba is going through. And my colleague has every right to ask some of those questions. And as we've seen, the individuals that are being affected have those concerns, and that's what we're bringing to the table today.

So I'd like to ask the advocate: As other First Nations communities are coming towards jurisdictional transformation and their own oversight, have other First Nations approached the advocate with similar concerns to what Chief Dr. Bird—Stanley Bird have brought up publicly?

Ms. Gott: So I guess one of the things I could say to you is that, you know, we do receive calls from youth that have concerns about service delivery and mechanisms and all that in place. We need to meet—to ensure that their rights are met, we need to ensure that their voices are heard and we need to ensure that their service delivery requirements are met.

So we continue to advocate for those children. We will never turn any child away. And as far as hearing from other agencies, I can't answer that question right now because of the fact that there's only one agency in Manitoba that asserted jurisdiction.

So we continue to get calls from First Nation agencies and First Nation children that require support and advocacy, so we will continue to do that work. That is our legislative mandate: to ensure that service delivery is met.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Mrs. Stone: You had mentioned in one of your comments that you're working to—the advocate was working towards MOUs with various jurisdictions. So could the advocate please speak to what we're looking at for timelines? You know, we've been talking about this for a couple years now, as to a process for MOUs so the advocate can provide the support and fill those gaps that are clearly coming up, like we've seen with Peguis.

* (11:10)

So if the advocate could kind of talk through what some of those timelines look like: how confident is the advocate in getting those MOUs signed so that we ensure that children and youth are not falling through the cracks as Manitoba goes through this major transformational change?

Ms. Gott: I could tell you that we—when I first started as the advocate three years ago, I was meeting with agencies on a regular basis and we were just going through our mandate and our legislative mandate to ensure that the children's rights are met.

And currently, one of the communities have reached out to us to ensure—they want to meet and talk about our mandate and our legislative—especially our legislation, to talk about how they could fit into our system and how we could support their needs.

So I have no timeline other than, you know, when agencies reach out, we are there to support and we are there to make—advise, make recommendations, on how to continue working through their processes. Because I know the system is really difficult. It's very difficult to work in the child-welfare system, just so you know that. I've been doing that for a long time. And when there's lack of resources in the system, it creates a lot of uncertainty for the kids, right?

So, ultimately, I think we need to ensure that children are safe.

Thank you.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Ms. Byram: So just building on that a little bit where you have indicated the lack of resources in some of these—in the child-welfare system—and we're hearing from a particular First Nation community and you're learning as we transition through this jurisdictional care as well—is there a mechanism in place for the advocate's office to—as you're learning, to share with other agencies?

Do you have something sort of in place where you can go out and share some of your insight in helping transition through this?

Ms. Gott: We have been working internally on how to, you know, ensure that we are supportive and available through any agency in Manitoba. And so we work in collaboration with anybody that comes to us and we listen to their needs and then we try our best to work with those agencies.

We did develop an MOU—it's very legalistic at this point—and we shared it with one agency, and that was where it was left at.

So we will continue to try and reach out through our public ed campaigns that we are available to support and help in any way that we can. You know, as far as advocating for children, we will continue to do that.

Ms. Byram: I have no further questions at this time.

I do just want to say thank you to the office of the advocate and for all the work that they do and the advocacy that they provide for children and their care. So thank you.

The Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, I will now put the question on the report.

Annual Report of the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025—pass.

The hour being 11:13, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

The Chairperson: Committee will rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 11:14 a.m.

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