



June 12, 2014

Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark,

We are writing in support of the recommendations contained in the report *On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth as They Leave Government Care*, released by Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond in April 2014. The report provides ample evidence in support of the Province's responsibility to provide targeted services and supports to these highly vulnerable youth well beyond their nineteenth birthdays to ensure that they have the same opportunities as their non-care peers. In summary, the Representative recommends that Government:

1. Establish a Youth Secretariat within the Ministry of Children and Family Development, to take responsibility for leading, monitoring and strengthening supports for youth transitioning out of care.
2. Mandate and strengthen educational planning and skills training pathways for every youth in care.
3. Build a durable policy foundation for youth programs and services in B.C., including considering legislative amendments to permit the extension of foster care for some youth up to the age of 25 and the creation of a Youth Leaving Care Act, as they have in the U.K.
4. Hold public hearings on youth leaving care and out-of-home placements hosted by the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth of the B.C. Legislature.

These are thoughtful, well-founded recommendations that, if acted upon by your government, would help move B.C.'s support for youth leaving care from piecemeal and insufficient to a more systematic approach which respects these young people's rights and recognizes their potential.

The call for better transition supports for youth leaving and from care has been echoed by a number of other recent studies and inquiries. For example, the report *Avoiding the Precipice* released in March by the University Victoria evaluates a successful program run by Aunt Leah's Place and notes, "the results of this study support extending the age of government care-related supports to young people to age 24." The report released in April 2014 by the Conference Board of Canada, *Success for All: Investing in the Future of Canadian Children in Care*, concludes that investing in children in care is both cost effective and is the right thing to do.

The lost potential represented in the statistically poor outcomes for youth in and from care is also documented in a number of previous reports from the Representative's office and joint reports with the Provincial Health Officer.

This new report very helpfully provides detailed information on the more comprehensive supports offered to youth in and from care in Ontario, as well as pointing out how B.C. can more proactively access federal benefits for children in care and make sure those benefits are directed to individual children and youth as beneficiaries.

In light of this growing awareness and evidence of the inadequacy of our current transition supports for youth leaving provincial care, we urge your government to act swiftly and with conviction on the recommendations contained in the Representative's report. We understand at this point they have not yet been accepted by your government, but may be revisited in future.

The 700 young people aging out of care each year have a right to transition supports secured in government policy backed up by appropriate resources. We recognize that the report's recommendations do require additional investments to be made through the relevant ministries to support their implementation, and point out that we cannot afford the costs of failing to offer timely support we are already incurring. Beyond economics, we also have duty to be good 'parents'.

As the report outlines, there have been a number of new transition programs and initiatives developed over the past several years, some by government, some by philanthropic donations. We applaud these efforts and look forward to hearing that the recommendations in *On Their Own* have been embraced by your government and given the priority attention they warrant.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Montani
Provincial Coordinator

Copies: Hon. Don McRae, Minister of Children and Family Development
Hon. Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education
John Horgan, Leader of the Opposition
Carole James, MCFD Critic
Rob Fleming, Education Critic
Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth
Mark Sieben, Deputy Minister, MCFD
Rob Wood, Deputy Minister, Education
First Call Coalition partner organizations (list enclosed)