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OVERVIEW OF POSITION

UNICEF Canada is concerned that the elimination of the Ontario Child and Youth Advocate via Bill 57, *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act*, will have long-term negative repercussions on our most vulnerable populations in Ontario. Children and youth in every riding in Ontario access critical services and are involved in child welfare, justice and mental health systems. An independent Advocate with the existing mandate to engage these vulnerable youth, support them in accessing the services they need, and help ensure that the services are effective and the outcomes are better for the children reduces financial and social costs to these communities and the people of Ontario.

While we understand that at least some of the responsibilities and the staff capacity to advocate for children will be available under the provincial Ombudsman, we believe that repealing the independence and full mandate of the Advocate is a big step backward. As the jurisdiction that led the world in recognizing the need for focused advocacy for children, and one of the wealthiest provinces, the repeal of the legislation for an independent advocate is a signal that children matter less. Children should be the last and least to bear the burden of austerity. Investing in the independent Child and Youth Advocate with the current scope of responsibility is an investment in children, and ultimately should save costs because services are better and outcomes for children are better. We have four main concerns over this decision.

First and foremost, the Government of Ontario has a duty to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled and to invest in children as a priority. For the relatively small investment, the Advocate helps children and youth today in more ways than it will be able to do within an institution that is complaints based, as is the Ombudsman's Office. There will be less impact for the investment made.

Secondly, the nature of the Ombudsman's office may not adequately protect the rights of children insofar as it is largely complaints based and does not have as much autonomy or capacity to proactively report on issues that are facing youth. Complaints are based on harms done, which are costlier than preventing harm by helping ensure services and policies are effective.

Thirdly, Children risk losing out to louder complaints by other individuals and groups. In examining the latest Ombudsman Annual report, with over 21,000 complaints received by the Ombudsman Office and a wide range of public sector bodies, it is fair to conclude that with so many organizations and areas to focus on, children will not receive a priority or sufficient focus.

Finally, youth should be the last and least to face cuts during financial austerity. This is especially critical for our most vulnerable youth including youth who are involved in child welfare, youth justice and secure treatment programs. These vulnerable youth require the proactive analysis and protection that an independent Advocate provides. There are no better substitutes to hear them and protect them.



We urge the elected officials of Ontario to put the interests of children above others, as they rightfully deserve, and protect the independence and scope of responsibility of their Advocate.

ABOUT UNICEF

As a UN agency, UNICEF is active in 190 countries and we have saved more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization. UNICEF Canada is a Canadian non-governmental organization (NGO) established 60 years ago and is the representative of UNICEF in Canada. We work tirelessly as part of the global UNICEF family to do whatever it takes to ensure that children and young people survive and thrive, and have every opportunity to reach their full potential. Our global reach, unparalleled influence with policymakers, and diverse partnerships make us an instrumental force in shaping a world where the rights of all children are realized. UNICEF Canada builds awareness, raises funds, and mobilizes Canadians across the country to help save and protect the world's most vulnerable children. We promote public policy and practices in the best interests of children, informed by our global experience and international best practice, to contribute to the fulfillment of children's rights in Canada and around the world. UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.

UNICEF is entirely supported by voluntary donations and helps all children, regardless of race, religion or politics. The only organization named in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a source of expertise for governments, UNICEF has exceptional access to those whose decisions impact children's survival and quality of life. We are the world's advocate for children and their rights. For more information about UNICEF, please visit www.unicef.ca.