



NOVEMBER 20, 2009 DECLARATION OF CONCERN FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Ever since Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 20 has been marked in this country as National Child Day.

The Convention says governments should protect children from harm and help them live and grow to their full potential.

This commitment is not being kept in Ontario. Thousands of vulnerable children and youth are at risk because the Ontario government refuses to sufficiently fund children's aid and children's mental health services.

Children's aid societies face a \$67 million budget shortfall. Services will be cut and staff will be laid off unless the government provides funding. Child abuse response timelines, legislated as a result of child deaths in the 1990s, will not be met. Severe budget cuts to northern and First Nations agencies place these high-risk communities at even greater risk.

Chronically underfunded child and youth mental health agencies serve many of the same vulnerable children as children's aid societies.

Agency budgets have been flat-lined, forcing providers to cut programs and staff despite the growing need for service. Referrals for service have increased by 35 per cent during the economic downturn. More than 500,000 young people in Ontario will struggle with their mental health and may suffer from depression, anxiety or an eating disorder.

Children and youth in Ontario are suffering, and some may even die, because they aren't getting timely access to much-needed services. Agencies lack the capacity to intervene early when problems first arise. Left unattended, these problems only escalate and the impacts are felt in the family and in the community.

In light of this crisis, and in recognition of Canada's solemn commitment on National Child Day, we the undersigned, declare that the Ontario government must fulfill its obligation to protect our children and youth from harm and provide for their healthy development, before it's too late.

Name

Signature

Affiliation

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