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McGuinty Government Moves To Make Ontario's Child Advocate Independent

Delivering On Key Commitment To Vulnerable Children And Youth

QUEEN'S PARK - The McGuinty government will introduce legislation this spring that, if passed, would better protect the interests of vulnerable children and youth by establishing an independent child advocate in Ontario, Children and Youth Services Minister Marie Bountrogianni announced today.

"There can be no room for political interference when it comes to the rights of our youngest citizens," said Bountrogianni. "This legislation would entrench the rights and voices of children and youth to an extent never before seen in Ontario."

The planned legislation would make the child and youth advocate an officer of the legislature and as independent as the auditor general. Under the new law, the advocate would be selected by an all-party legislative committee and report directly to the legislature. Currently, the advocate reports to the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

"We are committed to giving our children and youth a stronger voice," Bountrogianni said. "In addition to affirming the role of the advocate, the McGuinty government is the first to establish a dedicated children's ministry to ensure our young people have a seat right at the cabinet table."

A third-party review of the advocate's office was initiated by Bountrogianni last year. The review provided research and recommendations on ways to enhance the advocate's independence to better protect the interests of children and youth.

"Elevating the position of the child and youth advocate to the same level of independence as the auditor general sends a powerful message that this government is serious about accountability and transparency," said Judy Finlay, Ontario's Chief Advocate for the past 14 years.

The child and youth advocate speaks on behalf of Ontario's most vulnerable young people, including children, youth and families involved with the justice system, foster, group or residential care, or with physical and developmental disabilities.

"An independent advocate will help ensure that the laws that protect children and youth from harsh treatment and abuse are enforced," said Mark Monette, former Crown ward and member of Youth Piece.

"This planned legislation delivers on a key commitment of this government and a promise we made to Ontario's children and youth," said Bountrogianni.