



# Power to probe CAS urged for ombudsman

By [VIVIAN SONG](#), TORONTO SUN

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Children's Aid societies enjoy a shield of immunity that make it nearly impossible to hold them accountable, say child advocates on the heels of a leaked report detailing gross misspending.

David Witzel, who grew up in foster care and is suing the Hamilton Wentworth Children's Aid Society for sexual abuse, renewed the call to give the provincial ombudsman power to investigate the child welfare system.

Currently complaints are investigated internally. Appeals are dealt with by a government-appointed board.

Witzel pointed to Jeffrey Baldwin, who was handed over to his grandmother Elva Bottineau despite her having been convicted of killing her own baby. Jeffrey, 5, died of starvation. Bottineau's record was on file but the Toronto Catholic Children's Aid Society has never been investigated by police.

## 'IT HAS NO TEETH'

Though the province announced the introduction of an independent child advocate Thursday -- the same day the media got wind of the leaked auditor's report -- Witzel lambasted the new role, calling it useless

because it would only have the authority to review complaints and not act on them.

"They have no power to do anything," Witzel said. "They can do exactly what they've been doing now, which is exactly nothing. It has no teeth."

In a report obtained by the CBC, provincial auditors allege that senior managers received SUVs worth as much as \$59,000, and paid for gym memberships and trips to the Caribbean with taxpayers' money.

"The best way to deal with the CAS is by allowing the ombudsman, who has the tools, staff and experience, to have oversight over the CAS," agreed Andrea Horwath, NDP critic for children and youth services.

"Child advocates won't be able to investigate, issue subpoenas to witnesses or force the handing over of documents," she said. "A child advocate would not be able to investigate the use of SUVs."

Past pleas by Ontario Ombudsman Andre Marin asking the government to give his office further investigative powers fell on deaf ears.