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QUESTION PERIOD
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CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Today at Queen's Park, advocates spoke out for J., an 11-year-old boy who was misdiagnosed and overmedicated while in the care of the Durham CAS. J.'s grandparents depleted their life savings trying to gain custody. Thankfully, they finally succeeded in getting J. home. They are now looking for accountability. They want to ensure that no other family has to go through the same ordeal. Minister, why are you denying children and their families an independent avenue of appeal of CAS decisions?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I actually saw a press release that the member from Hamilton East issued today. She spoke about the fact that, yes, we are creating an independent process in the form of the Child and Family Services Review Board, which is under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Ombudsman, incidentally. But she was concerned that we have not yet established this process.

As we all know in this Legislature, it takes a little time, and the proclamation of this act is effective November of this year. It would have been earlier if the opposition parties had not held that bill up in the spring of this year. So it's interesting that she should be speaking to the fact that that has not yet been proclaimed, when in fact she could have contributed to much earlier proclamation of that bill had she been committed to this file.

Ms. Horwath: My question wasn't about your ineptitude to get a bill passed and to get it proclaimed; my question was about the fact that there is no minimal oversight even, at this point, for these families who are having problems with the CAS.

You have not given the Ombudsman oversight, which is what you should do, over the Child and Family Services Review Board. When you finally do proclaim Bill 210, the Ombudsman will only be allowed to determine -- and you know this very well -- whether or not the board followed its own rules. You can't dig into the substantive issues that families bring forward. You cannot dig into the complaints and the systemic issues that are happening within the CAS. Minister, why are you blocking families from an independent avenue of appeal by refusing to pass my bill, which would allow the Ombudsman review over CAS decisions?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: If there is anyone who is inept here, it's not our government, because our government would have had that bill passed one month earlier had it not been for the games that were being played in this Legislature.

Let me speak to the particular situation that I think gave rise to the member's question. To give you an example of how sincere we are and how much we are committed to the protection of children in this province, I can tell you that I am working with that particular case -- and I want to thank the member from Durham for bringing that to my attention; he was the first person to do that -- and I have actually met with people involved, including that grandparent. I have launched an investigation into that situation, and we're going to make sure that other kids don't suffer the same kinds of tragic circumstances that that young man suffered.