



Leaked report critical of Ontario's Children's Aid

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TORONTO -- A leaked report detailing spending abuses at four Ontario Children's Aid societies, including buying luxury vehicles and vacations for executives, provoked a flurry of condemnation Thursday from the opposition but muted response from the government.

Faced with a damning draft report that found money intended to help the province's most vulnerable children was instead redirected to several high-ranking society officials, Children and Youth Services Minister Mary Anne Chambers refused comment.

"Why would I defend something that I have not received a formal report on," Chambers said when faced with a barrage of questions at an unrelated news conference.

"If there are things that are worthy of defence, I will be happy to defend them, and if there are things that are worthy of strong action, I'll be only to happy and willing and eager to take that strong action."

CBC Radio reported Thursday it had obtained a final draft of the auditor general's value-for-money audit of Children's Aid societies in Toronto, York, Peel and Thunder Bay, Ont., which found several executives were given luxury vehicles and expensive trips to the Caribbean, South America and China.

"I am not hiding from anything," Chambers insisted when pressed on the issue after announcing an independent provincial advocate for children and youth.

"I need you to know that I am dying to be able to speak about the findings of the auditor, and as soon as I can, I will."

Chambers said she would deal with the findings next Tuesday, when the report is officially released, and vowed to take whatever action necessary.

Conservative Leader John Tory said Chambers should move immediately to make sure

Children's Aid societies are not being too generous with their executives instead of ducking questions about the auditor's report.

"When you got notice there was scandalous spending going on, trips and cars and gym memberships and expensive meals, did you do anything at that time," Tory asked in the legislature.

New Democrat Leader Howard Hampton said the auditor general had uncovered "shocking evidence" of improper spending and, like Tory, tried unsuccessfully to get Chambers to respond.

"Children at risk went without basic services, while CAS executives spent money on high end restaurants, jetted to the Caribbean, South America and Asia, and spent money on luxury vehicles costing more than \$50,000 each," Hampton said.

"I think you owe people across Ontario a straight forward and direct answer: when did you first learn about this situation?"

Chambers again declined to answer, but said she was proud that the Liberals gave the auditor general the power to investigate the Children's Aid Society so any problems could be uncovered and dealt with.

The auditor's report also questioned why government funding for the society has more than doubled in six years to about \$1.2 billion a year, while the number of families served increased by 40 per cent.

Auditor General Jim McCarter said Thursday that he could not comment on a draft document, and would speak to his report after it was released on Tuesday.

Ontario's Child Advocate Judy Finlay said she was "very disturbed" by the leaked report from the auditor general, and noted her office looks at the services provided to children in custody, not at financial operations of the centres.