
STATEMENT

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Ministry of Children and Family Development

Minister's response to ombudsperson on youth justice report

VICTORIA – Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development, has issued the following statement in response to the June 15, 2021, report from the Office of the British Columbia Ombudsperson:

“I want to thank the ombudsperson for this thorough report and the work that went into it. We are committed to the same goals: ensuring that youth in our care receive the best possible services to help them stay safe, be healthy and fulfil their potential. We accept the spirit and intent of the recommendations in the report and will incorporate them into the development of our youth justice framework.

“Both the child welfare system and the justice system are overly involved in the lives of Indigenous people, children and families. It is part of the damaging colonial legacy that continues to this day – and as part of our commitment to reconciliation, we need to address it head on.

“Since forming government in 2017, we have made transforming the system of supports and addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care a priority. We recognize the implications that separate confinement can have on a youth’s mental health and wellness, particularly for Indigenous and racialized youth who have been disproportionately affected by this practice.

“Our province consistently has among the lowest numbers of youth in custody in Canada, going from an average daily count of 130 youth in custody in 2009-10 to an average of just 13 across the province today – including a daily average count of two youth at Prince George Youth Custody Services.

“Because B.C.’s youth custody rates are among the lowest in Canada, there are instances where youth, especially girls, are in custody by themselves. Although we do not consider this separate confinement, the ombudsperson included these circumstances in their data.

“While separate confinement is not used as a punitive measure for youth in B.C., we continue to commit to putting the best interests of youth first – using trauma-informed, culturally safe practices – and placing the young people we are caring for at the centre of everything we do. That’s why the ministry has made significant changes to its approach to youth custody, youth justice and separate confinement since 2017. Where possible, we have incorporated the findings from the ombudsperson’s review during that time.

“That said, we have more work to do. We must do more to ensure that youth who come into contact with the justice system can stay connected to their families and their culture and feel a strong sense of belonging in all aspects of their lives.”

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