

**Submission on Bill 57**  
**Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act**

**to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs**

**Submitted by**

**Defence for Children International-Canada**

**December 3, 2018**



**a worldwide movement for children's rights**

The purpose of this submission is to express concern over the Repeal of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act and the closure of the office of the Provincial Advocate, and to propose an alternative approach.

**Background:**

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act (the Act) was developed with extensive input over a number of years. It was based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) which was signed and ratified by the Government of Canada and represents Canada's promises to our children. The development of the Act also took into account the real life experiences of children and included practices that were successful in other jurisdictions. This is legislation that was supported by all political parties in Ontario and in particular was championed by Lisa MacLeod..

The Provincial Advocate's Act has provided strong advocacy and support for children and has been used as a model for other provinces/territories in Canada and beyond. It makes no sense to destroy what has taken years to create and which is recognized as successful both by children and by other governments.

The reason put forward for the closure of the Advocacy Office is cost-savings. At the same time we are hearing that staff will be transferred to the Office of the Ombudsman. If that is the case, the savings would be miniscule, basically representing the salary of the Provincial Advocate. For that small saving there would be a loss of leadership and direction. If the intent is to cut staff or to reduce staff through attrition, the Government should be transparent about its plan and should openly acknowledge that it is cutting services to some of our most vulnerable children.

The Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Provincial Advocate serve two very different purposes. The Ombudsman looks at issues and determines whether the government has acted in a way that is consistent with its policies. The Provincial Advocate looks at situations involving children, including some of the most vulnerable and isolated children, and stands with them as they live through or recount brutal experiences. The Advocate is also proactive in reaching out to hear the voices of children and to make sure they are taken into account.

The recommendations of the Advocacy Office have made major improvements in the way children are treated in our Province. Combining Offices with such different functions is likely to weaken the performance of both Offices.

**Recommendations to the Committee:**

It is recommended that:

The section of Bill 57 that pertains to The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act be removed from the Bill and be reviewed as a separate issue.

If there is a need for cost efficiencies in the Office of the Provincial Advocate that this issue be considered in a way that protects the fundamental purpose of the Office and meets the Government's need to reduce spending. This could be a time limited process.

During the task of finding efficiencies, that the Office continue to fulfill its legislated functions so there is no gap in the services to children and youth.

Submitted by Agnes Samler

on behalf of the Board of Directors of DCI-Canada