



Report

SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO APPOINT A REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

May 2023



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Fourth Session, 42nd Parliament



May 8, 2023

To the Honourable
Legislative Assembly of the
Province of British Columbia

Honourable Members:

We have the honour to present herewith the Report of the Special Committee to Appoint a Representative for Children and Youth containing our unanimous recommendation.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

Kelli Paddon, MLA
Chair

Coralee Oakes, MLA
Deputy Chair

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Composition of the Committee

Members

Kelli Paddon, MLA, [Chair](#)
Chilliwack-Kent

Coralee Oakes, MLA, [Deputy Chair](#)
Cariboo North

Mike Bernier, MLA
Peace River South

Kelly Greene, MLA
Richmond-Steveston

Nicholas Simons, MLA
Powell River-Sunshine Coast

Committee Staff

Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Jennifer Arril, Clerk of Committees

Darryl Hol, Senior Research Analyst

Mary Heeg, Committee Researcher

Mary Newell, Administrative Coordinator

Terms of Reference

On February 23, 2023, the Legislative Assembly agreed that a Special Committee to Appoint a Representative for Children and Youth be appointed to select and unanimously recommend to the Legislative Assembly the appointment of an individual as the Representative for Children and Youth for the province of British Columbia, pursuant to section 2 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* (S.B.C. 2006, c. 29).

That the Special Committee shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and in addition be empowered to:

- a. appoint of its number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Special Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;
- b. sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- c. adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- d. retain such personnel as required to assist the Special Committee.

That the Special Committee report to the House as soon as possible; and that during a period of adjournment, the Special Committee deposit its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, or in the next following Session, as the case may be, the Chair present all reports to the House.

Introduction

The Representative for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislature responsible for external oversight of the provincial child- and youth-serving system. The representative's mandate includes: advocating on behalf of children, youth, and young adults to improve their understanding of and access to designated services; monitoring, reviewing, auditing, and publicly reporting on these services; and conducting reviews and investigations into the critical injuries and deaths of children receiving reviewable services.

The position of representative was established in 2006 with the unanimous adoption of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*. The Act implemented recommendations made by the Honourable Ted Hughes in his review of British Columbia's child welfare system. Subsection 2(1) of the Act provides that: "The Legislative Assembly, by resolution, may appoint as the Representative for Children and Youth a person who has been unanimously recommended for the appointment by a special committee." Subsection 2(3) establishes that the representative's term is five years, and that a representative may be reappointed for one additional five-year term.

There have been three representatives appointed since 2006. The current representative, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, was appointed on October 1, 2018 by the Legislative Assembly.

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth has offices in Victoria and Prince George, as well as staff working remotely across the province. The office's operating budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year was \$10.98 million, including funding for 77 FTEs. Since Dr. Charlesworth was appointed in 2018, legislative and regulatory amendments have expanded the office's mandate regarding advocacy for young adults.

On February 23, 2023, the Legislative Assembly established the Special Committee to Appoint a Representative for Children and Youth to recommend the appointment of a representative.

Meetings Schedule

During the fourth session of the 42nd Parliament, the Committee met on the following dates for the purposes described below:

March 15, 2023	Organization and planning
March 27, 2023	Deliberations
April 24, 2023	Interview
April 27, 2023	Deliberations Adoption of Report

Recruitment Process

The Committee began its work to appoint a Representative for Children and Youth on March 15, 2023 with an organization and planning meeting. The Committee elected a Chair and Deputy Chair and adopted a motion to hold all meetings and deliberations on a confidential, *in camera* basis, in keeping with the usual practice for appointment committees. Members also reviewed the Committee's terms of reference, the duties and functions of the representative, and a preliminary workplan for the Committee's activities.

At the invitation of the Committee, the incumbent, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, indicated her interest to seek reappointment for an additional five-year term. During its March 27 meeting, the Committee held in-depth discussions on the profile and key competencies for the position of representative, agreed to interview Dr. Charlesworth for possible reappointment, and had an in-depth discussion about the interview questions.

On April 24, 2023, the Committee interviewed Dr. Charlesworth. Members reviewed her qualifications, experience, and work as representative. They also considered her perspective on the position's mandate and its operationalization; leadership and efforts to cultivate a respectful and inclusive work environment; work with Indigenous communities and perspectives on reconciliation; communication, relationship-building, analytical, and decision-making skills; effectiveness in building public confidence in the office; and ethics, values, and personal suitability for reappointment as an independent, non-partisan officer of the Legislature.

Reflecting on her first term as Representative, Committee Members recognized Dr. Charlesworth's success in strengthening working relationships with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and other public bodies, as well as with Indigenous communities and organizations, including Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies.

It was clear to the Committee that Dr. Charlesworth sees building strong relationships as an important part of improving outcomes for children and youth in British Columbia.

Committee Members also recognized Dr. Charlesworth's focus on supporting her staff and improving the workplace culture of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. This includes fostering cultural safety, promoting diversity and inclusion, increasing recruitment of Indigenous staff, and working to build a positive team environment.

Finally, Committee Members acknowledged that Dr. Charlesworth effectively led the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth during a challenging time, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the confirmation of remains of Indigenous children in unmarked burial sites at former Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia.

Overall, Committee Members recognized Dr. Charlesworth's dedication to improving outcomes for children, youth, young adults, their families and communities across British Columbia. They noted her long-serving commitment to vulnerable children and youth in the province, her passion for and deep understanding of the child- and youth-serving system, and her constant focus on keeping children and youth at the forefront of her and her team's work.

As a result, the Committee has full confidence in Dr. Charlesworth's continued leadership in this important position and unanimously agreed to recommend to the Legislative Assembly that she be reappointed Representative for Children and Youth for a further term of five years, effective October 1, 2023.

Recommendation

The Committee unanimously recommends to the Legislative Assembly that Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth be reappointed as Representative for Children and Youth for a further five-year term, effective October 1, 2023, pursuant to section 2 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* (S.B.C. 2006, c. 29).

Biographical Information

Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth (she/her/hers) was introduced to the child and youth caring field in 1977, which set in motion an enduring commitment to nurture the well-being of children, youth, and families within their communities. She has worked in diverse government, non-profit, academic, and volunteer roles in British Columbia’s social and health care sectors, including in front-line, policy, program management, advisory, educational, and executive positions. Along the way, Dr. Charlesworth has contributed to formative work on deinstitutionalization and community inclusion for people with disabilities, women’s and girls’ health, mental health, youth services, child rights, residential care, and legislative reform.

Early in her career, Dr. Charlesworth began to wonder whether and how child- and family-serving systems could be improved to enhance the quality of experience and life outcomes for those who are marginalized and more vulnerable – often as a result of colonization and lack of access to the social determinants of well-being. This quest led to her involvement in the implementation of recommendations arising from the 1995 Gove Inquiry into Child Protection, the formation of the Ministry for Children and Families, the expansion of the Federation of Community Social Services of B.C., and the Premier’s Advisory Council on Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. She was the Organizational Change lead at InWithForward, Canada’s first social research and development collective weaving together social science research and design to generate meaningful social innovation. Since 2016, Dr. Charlesworth has worked with Chief Wedlidi Speck and many other leaders to inspire culturally safer workplaces and services for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous staff and people served.



During Dr. Charlesworth’s first term as Representative for Children and Youth, she facilitated a mandate expansion for individual advocacy, strengthened ties with Indigenous leadership and organizations, expanded the ways in which the Office informs and influences systemic change, and integrated “two-eyed seeing” methodology into the representative’s investigative work and research. Under her leadership, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth has released more than 20 reports that have addressed substance use, mental health, neurodiversity and disability, youth in transition to adulthood, youth homelessness, care planning, fiscal discrimination in Indigenous child welfare funding, belonging, children missing from care, and child rights. Recommendations arising from these reports have been made to nine public bodies and shifted mindsets, practice, and planning in key areas of service.

Dr. Charlesworth is a white settler who was raised on the unceded ancestral lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and who has raised her family on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen and ƳSÁNEĆ peoples. She is deeply grateful to be able to live on these extraordinary lands. She holds a PhD in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria, and a Global MBA from Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, England. She is an award-winning teacher, author, activist, and – most importantly- a parent of two adult children who call her into curiosity, compassion, community, and learning in a beautiful way.

