

Cooperation key to protecting children

For immediate release

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The BC Government and Service Employees' Union urges government to finally accept its long-standing offer to work together to address systemic problems in child protection, following the report released today by BC's Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.

"The deaths of these four vulnerable children are tragic. Government should genuinely involve our union members in a process of meaningful change. We are allied with the same goal - to keep children safe," says BCGEU President George Heyman.

"We appreciate the Representative's efforts to understand the pressures faced by frontline staff who struggle to do their jobs without adequate resources," Heyman adds.

Turpel-Lafond emphasizes that it is clear from her many discussions with frontline workers that they are unwavering in their commitment to improve the system for children. At the same time, her report repeatedly stresses that workers on the front lines of child protection need greater support to do their jobs more effectively. She observes, "they can function well only when they are supported, clear supervision is available, and coherent policies, practices and sufficient resources underpin their efforts..."

The report recommends as one solution that government involve partners such as the BCGEU, delegated Aboriginal agencies, and others in addressing recruitment, retention and workload issues. Turpel-Lafond identifies understaffing and turnover in the northern B.C. region as a factor in the cases of the children who died.

Heyman notes that the Representative underlines that her "investigation found an inability on the part of the Ministry to learn from valuable lessons. Even internal Ministry reviews of these deaths provided lessons that were not returned to the front lines of the system... This investigation suggests that weakness in this process is likely greater than the misjudgement of a few individuals. It appears to have been and continue[s] to be systemic."

"These conclusions are disturbing," Heyman says. "The government has clearly not learned from past mistakes, nor previous recommendations to improve internal communication and analysis.

"The report's title Amanda, Savannah, Rowen and Serena: From Loss to Learning says it all. From here we must move forward together to meet the long term challenges of fixing a system that failed these children and their families."