



News Release

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REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH RELEASES VIDEO SUPPORTING LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH

VICTORIA – In recognition of National Child Day, B.C.'s Representative of Children and Youth today released a video in support of the It Gets Better project, aimed at inspiring B.C. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth to focus on a positive future ahead.

“This video is meant to spark a dialogue that can help give strength and encouragement to LGBT youth,” said Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. “Bullying and homophobia can deeply hurt those who need our support, and can destroy families, communities and lives. We need to help them find their voice and to reach out to those who respect and support them.”

The McCreary Centre Society, in its report “Not Yet Equal”, notes worrisome trends in the lives of LGBT youth, compared to their heterosexual peers. These include LGBT youth being more likely to have reported suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, in addition to experiencing higher rates of physical and sexual abuse, harassment in school, and discrimination in the community.

“We know LGBT youth, like all young people, have challenges in their lives,” said Turpel-Lafond. “We also know those challenges can be dramatically compounded by experiences of being bullied, discriminated against or abused. We have a responsibility to ensure they are encouraged to thrive, because all young people have the right to be respected and supported.”

Turpel-Lafond said that everyone watching the video is encouraged to think about practical, concrete ways to be champions for this particularly vulnerable group of youth, and to act to make their lives better.

She noted that homophobia within both the youth and adult populations is still very much alive. “We need to continue to educate about this, so young people feel supported and know they belong.

“A video is a starting point only in working towards changing attitudes, policies and environments,” said Turpel-Lafond. “We have to take real steps within our communities, our schools, our governments and our daily lives, to improve the path for LGBT youth. We can do this by creating policies that leave no doubt around equality, by developing safe meeting places, and working hard to eliminate systemic barriers to LGBT youth being themselves.”

The Representative said that she has also written to Premier Christy Clark and Education Minister George Abbott. Her letter expresses support of other initiatives underway relating to homophobia in schools, such as the Purple Letter campaign, and urges government to implement a province-wide sexual orientation and gender identity policy for all B.C. schools, to ensure LGBT students throughout B.C. are supported and protected.

“For LGBT youth, this abuse often takes place in a school environment, and that is unacceptable,” she said. “We have a responsibility to do everything possible to make B.C. schools safe, welcoming places for all students.”

The video from the Representative’s Office highlights the experiences of a variety of British Columbians in dealing with bullying, homophobia, discrimination and being different.

Video participants include Dr. Hedy Fry (MP for Vancouver Centre), Spencer Chandra Herbert (MLA for Vancouver West-End), several youth activists, a female Victoria police officer, a First Nations youth worker, a young Victoria opera singer, cast and crew from the current Vancouver production of Mamma Mia, and others. Redbird Communications of Victoria donated a portion of their production costs in support of the Representative’s It Gets Better video project.

The main video and four break-out videos can be viewed at www.rcybc.ca .

The “It Gets Better” campaign was launched in the U.S. in 2010 in response to an epidemic of teen suicides by LGBT youth. Thousands of videos have been submitted by politicians, celebrities, organizations, activists and youth from around the world. Campaign supporters emphasize that every video can change a life. The videos also encourage young people to seek help if they are in crisis.

The Representative for Children and Youth is an Independent Officer of the Legislature, who champions the fundamental rights of vulnerable children and youth, and promotes improvements in services to them. The Representative has offices in Burnaby, Victoria and Prince George.