

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Equitable treatment of First Nations children and youth must be at the forefront of Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, says Provincial Advocate**

**TORONTO, ON (Monday, February 25, 2013)** – Hearings will get under way today at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to determine whether the Federal government is discriminating against First Nations families and children on reserves by underfunding child welfare services. Earlier this year, the Advocate was denied leave to intervene in the hearings, however he will continue to push for all children to be afforded equal access to the services they need.

“These hearings are about the values we hold as Canadians, especially on matters of equality and quality of life,” said Irwin Elman, [Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth](#). “If we are to interpret the Canadian Human Rights Act in a manner that would allow the services provided by the federal government to First Nations children and families on reserve to be dramatically inferior to those off reserve, and yet not take this to be discrimination, I have grave concerns about the message that sends to First Nations, and to children and youth of all backgrounds.”

First Nations children and youth are one of the most vulnerable populations of young people in Canada. Many live in extreme poverty and have no access to basic levels of education, housing or health care.

The complaint was first filed with the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2007 by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations. The Advocate’s support for the Caring Society’s complaint is rooted in the [Advocate’s mandate](#) to be a voice for children and youth, including First Nations youth, on issues that impact their lives on a day to day basis and have the potential to leverage lasting change.

“We will be following each step in this case with great interest as observers and with concern regarding its potential impact for First Nations children and youth,” says Elman. “This is a children’s rights issue, not simply an issue about funding and jurisdictions. The hearings will have a significant, real-life impact on thousands of First Nations children and youth in child welfare care or in the margins of care. It will impact the resources and supports available to meet their needs and build the foundation for their future.”

**About the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth**

The Office of the Provincial Advocate reports directly to the Legislature and provides an independent voice for children and youth, including children with special needs and First Nations children. The Provincial Advocate receives and responds to concerns from children, youth and families who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act and the Education Act (Provincial and Demonstration Schools), including youth in custody. The Provincial Advocate identifies systemic problems involving children, conducts reviews and provides education and advice on the issue of advocacy and the rights of children. The Office is guided by the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has a strong commitment to youth involvement.

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Mr. Elman will be attending the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal today and is available to media for interviews.

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