

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ontario's Child and Youth Advocate launches new initiative to elevate the voice of children and youth with special needs

TORONTO, ON – Ontario's Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth announced today a new youth-focused initiative aimed at engaging young people with special needs in a discussion about how society can better support them to realize their full potential.

Young people are invited to participate in [I Have Something to Say](#) by making a submission to the Provincial Advocate in any format that inspires them to express their ideas for change: Letters, poems, stories, videos, photos, art and songs are welcome. The Advocate also encourages siblings, caregivers and professionals who can help elevate the voice of a child or youth who is difficult to reach to make a submission.

“An important part of my mandate is to partner with children and youth to bring issues forward that are important to them, said Irwin Elman, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. “Young people have so much wisdom to share with us based on their lived experience. We know that given the opportunity to participate, they will move mountains.”

There are close to 300,000 children in Ontario with special needs. They are often invisible to the province and excluded from decisions that affect their life. For some, there is a stark contrast between what society wants for them and the reality of their daily life.

“Everyone has the right to be heard,” says Crystal Chin, a Youth Amplifier on the project. “I Have Something to Say gives young people a chance to use their own voice, in their own way. We're excited to launch a process that can lead to changes in legislation, services and most importantly, the lives of children and youth with special needs.”

The deadline for submissions is December 3, which coincides with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. For more information about I Have Something to Say and how to make a submission, please visit our [website](#) or connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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[The Office of the Provincial Advocate](#) reports directly to the Ontario 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 and youth who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act and the Education Act (Provincial and Demonstration Schools). 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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