

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jeffrey Baldwin inquest: Ontario's Child and Youth Advocate calls for public inquiry into child protection

TORONTO, ON (February 4, 2014) – The Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth made its final submission today at the Jeffrey Baldwin inquest urging the jury to recommend a province-wide public inquiry into the protection of children in the province of Ontario. The following is a statement from Irwin Elman, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth:

"I urge the jury to recommend that the Premier of Ontario hold a public inquiry into the protection of children in Ontario to move the system forward. The examination cannot be held behind closed doors and it cannot be comprised only of the same people who created the systems in the first place or those who currently work in the system. It must be independent and involve the public, youth with lived experiences and others who can provide a fresh perspective.

After months of evidence, hearing about legislation, regulations, standards, policies, and best practices, we have to remember that this inquest is about Jeffrey Baldwin, a boy who was almost six years old, weighing under 22 pounds when he died of pneumonia as a complication of prolonged starvation like a 'discarded little boy'. Much of the evidence we heard was about why people didn't do things: there were no standards, it was not the practice at the time, there were no concerns and no red flags. The implication is that the system is different today, but despite what we have heard, I am not convinced that there has been significant change. That is why I am calling for a public inquiry into how we protect children and youth.

Jeffrey's death has been described as tragic, but so was his life. It is only due to Jeffrey's death that we know about the locked rooms, the deplorable conditions and the deprivation. It's not good enough that errors are only found and that changes are only made after a death. We expect and demand more. More from the child welfare system, more from the educational system, more from the neighbours, and more from the family who stood by and watched Jeffrey starve and die. We want a province where we have a care system that supports and nurtures children and families to be the best they can be and where every child is safe and protected. The coroner's inquest into Jeffrey's death must be a turning point. We can do better. We must act now."

The Provincial Advocate's recommendations to the jury can be found [here](#). A letter from the Provincial Advocate's youth advisory group to Jeffrey Baldwin and the jury can be found [here](#).

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 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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