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PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Growing Confidence in the Work and Achievements of the Child and Youth Advocate Office – Child and Youth Advocate Annual Report 2023-2024

CHARLOTTETOWN – The Child and Youth Advocate has presented his fourth Annual Report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, as tabled today in the Prince Edward Island Legislature.

Today's release, on November 20, coincides with National Child Day, which recognizes our country's commitment to upholding the rights of children and celebrates two historic events: the 1959 signing of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, exactly 35 years ago. The UNCRC serves as a guiding framework for our efforts to uphold the rights and well-being of all children. National Child Day is an opportunity to reflect on the progress made and to commit to continuing to advocate for children's rights and better life outcomes for children and youth.

“At the outset, I wish to recognize the tireless efforts of the many dedicated professionals in this province who interact with our Office and give so much of themselves to support children, youth and their families every single day. They are dealing with increasingly complex and multi-layered issues that are not capable of a quick fix. They have my deep admiration and respect”, says Bernstein.

“I am extremely pleased to report that we have seen a growing confidence expressed in the work and achievements of our Office. We are humbled by the trust that Island children and youth and other referring sources place in us: this is evidenced by the fact that within the last reporting period, our Office received the highest number of requests for advocacy support than in any other year, represented by 259 referrals, involving 306 children and youth. Additionally, we have seen a 150% increase in the proportion of calls to our Office placed directly by children and youth over the previous reporting year, from 6% of calls to our Office being made by children and youth directly in 2022-2023 to 15% of calls to our office being initiated by children and youth in 2023-2024”, notes Bernstein.

“Individual advocacy has remained a core function of our Office since it opened four and a half years ago. We continue to identify trends in individual advocacy. The rights of

children and youth in group residential care, the rights of children, youth and families receiving Child Protection Services, and the rights of children and youth with additional or complex needs in accessing educational supports and health care services are consistent themes in calls made to our Office. We continue to advocate for the inclusion of children’s rights provisions in child-serving provincial statutes and regulations; the enshrinement of child-rights based policies and complaint mechanisms across all reviewable service sectors; and the incorporation of child and youth participation in decision-making about children and youth”, states Bernstein.

“At the systemic level, in the past year, our Office has been active in advocating for child-rights based law reform. We have recommended a series of amendments to underpin the new *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*; proposed youth-sensitive amendments to the *Change of Name Act* and *Vital Statistics Act*; and continued to advocate for child rights-based amendments to the *Education Act*”, says Bernstein.

“Finally, during this reporting period, the Child and Youth Advisory Committee of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate successfully recruited new members and have continued to provide diverse and insightful feedback on a number of issues and initiatives through the eyes and experiences of children and youth. Specifically, the Child and Youth Advisory Committee provided consultation on the Inclusive Education Review and the Mental Health and Addictions Child and Youth Acute Care Unit; held discussions with the Public Schools Branch about the anonymous capacity of Report It!; and steered decision-making on the future terms and directions of their work. Their wisdom enriches the work of the Office, providing us with opportunities for greater understanding of the depth and breadth of issues facing PEI’s children and youth”, affirms Bernstein.

To learn more about the work of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and to view the Annual Report for 2023-2024, please visit www.childandyouthadvocatepei.ca

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