

December 6, 2018

Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto ON
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

As President of OPSEU, I am writing on behalf of the 7,000 members of our union who work in child protection, youth justice, children and youth mental health and children's treatment to demand the immediate reinstatement of the Child Advocate.

Children and teens across the province will be at significantly higher risk of abuse and mistreatment because of your reckless and ill-informed decision to abolish the Child Advocate.

My members know this because they work within the systems that the Child Advocate scrutinizes. Every day, they see first-hand the ways in which the system fails the children it is meant to help.

Because successive Conservative and Liberal governments have refused to enact whistleblower legislation, my members are not free to speak up. But the Child Advocate is, and always has been.

In group homes, child welfare offices, mental health wards, provincial and demonstration schools, and youth correctional facilities across the province, the Child Advocate's name and phone number are prominently displayed and well-known.

Kids and teens know who they can call for help. And they know that when they call, they will be heard and they will be helped.

With only modest expenses but a full-time and focused mandate, the Child Advocate has a long and proven track record of making our kids and teens safer.

The office has the power to investigate individual cases of abuse and mistreatment, but is also empowered to investigate the ways in which the system makes that abuse and mistreatment possible.

In other words, the Child Advocate office not only supports kids and teens who have suffered abuse, it also protects other kids and teens from suffering similar abuse.

The Child Advocate's exemplary work rooting out systemic abuse helped lead to many of the significant protections contained in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*.

But kids and teens need still more protection, not less. Abolishing this crucial office is short-sighted, cruel and immoral – it will lead to more kids and teens being abused and mistreated.

Your suggestion that the work of the Child Advocate can be shifted to the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman is so disingenuous that I hesitate to even dignify it with a formal response.

The Ombudsman already has a full workload – how could she or he possibly provide the same advocacy as an office dedicated to the task? And how could the Ombudsman provide the same advocacy as you're stripping the office's independence from political interference?

I demand that you restore a fully independent and empowered Child Advocate.

If you don't, more children and teens will fall through the cracks.

My members and I will never forget that. And come the next election, neither will you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Warren Thomas', with a stylized, cursive script.

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, Ontario Public Service Employees Union