

Open Letter to the Media

MB Department of Families continues to employ unlicensed child welfare workers

The Manitoba College of Social Workers appreciates the recent update on the status of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry recommendations issued by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth on March 11, 2021. This ongoing review and the calls for action related to this matter are critical to ensuring improved child welfare services and improved outcomes for Manitobans.

In 2013, Commissioner Ted Hughes issued his report, *The Legacy of Phoenix Sinclair: Achieving the Best for All our Children*. As part of this Inquiry Report, Commissioner Hughes recommended mandatory registration of social workers in child welfare as “an important tool for promoting accountability of social workers and delivery of services according to best practice.” He also recommended that the *Social Work Profession Act (the Act)* be amended to require anyone who practices social work in Manitoba, under whatever title, be required to be registered with the Manitoba College of Social Workers. Remarkably, the Department of Families has yet to comply with this recommendation.

The Department of Families as an employer and funder does not currently require regulatory oversight of employees in child welfare who hold social work degrees and are eligible to be registered as Social Workers. In fact, many child welfare agencies have intentionally changed position titles of employees formerly known as “Social Workers” to “CFS Workers” or other variations of title in order to avoid professional regulation. This has resulted in public confusion and lack of trust regarding the qualifications and practice standards of child welfare workers providing service to vulnerable children and families.

Every year, the Manitoba College of Social Workers receives multiple complaints regarding unregistered practitioners whom the public believes are registered and regulated Social Workers. These individuals, and in some cases these youth, must be advised that the College cannot assist them - that their voices cannot be heard - because the College does not have jurisdiction to evaluate their concerns.

The public has every right to assume that when they receive services from a government funded child welfare agency, that the social work practitioner is registered and accountable to their profession and to the public. It is clear that child welfare workers are viewed and referred to as “social workers”, which are often interchangeable terms in the eyes of the public. It is not reasonable for government employees and public servants to operate outside of the very regulatory framework of public protection and oversight that was established by the provincial government through its own *Act*.

Registered Social Workers have met qualification standards and are required to adhere to recognized national and provincial standards of practice, ethical conduct and ongoing learning to maintain their registration. Better outcomes for families depend on the skilled and regulated services of Registered Social Workers as qualified practitioners committed to achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

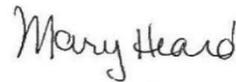
The voices of Manitobans receiving child welfare services should be as strong as those receiving the services of a lawyer, a physician, a psychiatrist or any other health care practitioner required to hold a license to practice. It is alarming that the Department of Families has neglected its responsibility to protect the public interest as they continue to permit unlicensed child welfare workers to provide critical services to Manitobans whose voices are silenced by the government's failure to ensure accountability.

On March 11, 2021, in response to the report of the Child Advocate, Minister Rochelle Squires reported that she had "instructed (her) department to implement the intent and the spirit of all the recommendations" of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry. In the interest of social justice; in honour of Phoenix Sinclair and the thousands of children and families who receive child welfare services in this province; and in respect of the knowledge and dedication of Commissioner Hughes - it is time for the Department of Families to truly commit to "Achieving the Best for All our Children" and ensure child welfare services are provided by licensed and accountable social workers.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director/Registrar



Mary Heard, MSW, RSW
President

March 12, 2021