



## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Independent Officers and Other Entities**

### ***Report on the Review of the 2014-2015 Annual Report of Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth***

**3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the 4<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of Nunavut  
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Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Independent Officers and Other Entities on its review of the 2014-2015 Annual Report of the Representative for Children and Youth.

Nunavut's *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was passed on September 17, 2013, by the third Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth has a number of areas of responsibility relating to the rights and interests of children and youth, including advocacy, advice and assistance regarding government services for children and youth, as well as the administration of the office.

The *Representative for Children and Youth Act* provides for the Commissioner of Nunavut to appoint, on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly, a Representative for Children and Youth for a five-year term of office.

Ms. Sherry McNeil-Mulak was appointed as Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth on June 2, 2014 and she assumed her duties on June 16, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, under section 35 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, the Representative for Children and Youth is required, within six months after the end of each fiscal year, to prepare and submit an annual report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on the conduct of the office and the discharge of the duties of the Representative during the preceding year.

The Standing Committee's televised hearings on the annual reports of independent officers of the Legislative Assembly provide an opportunity for the issues raised in the annual report to be discussed in a public forum.

The 2014-2015 annual report of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on May 30, 2016. The appearance of the Representative for Children and Youth and her staff before the standing committee took place in the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly on September 15, 2016. The Standing Committee's hearings were televised live across the territory and were open to the public and news media to observe from the Visitors' Gallery. Transcripts from the Standing Committee's hearings are made available on the Legislative Assembly's website.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the Representative's first annual report covers a period of nine months instead of a full fiscal year. During this period, as indicated in the annual report, the Representative's focus was on establishing her office from the ground up.

A number of themes and issues emerged during the Standing Committee's review of the Representative for Children and Youth's first annual report to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee appreciated the level of detail provided in the 2014-2015 Annual Report which related to the history of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, its role within the context of other child and youth advocacy initiatives across Canada and the range of documents and concepts which guide the Office's work. Issues relating to Inuit culture and the incorporation of Inuit Societal Values into the work of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth were addressed in some detail during the Representative's appearance before the Standing Committee.

Keeping in mind that the Office itself did not officially open until September 30, 2015 and, even though the 2014-2015 Annual Report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly well after that date, today's report focuses on basic themes which relate to the Office's operational structure and procedures and not on the Office's more recent practices and experiences.

Accordingly, the Standing Committee makes the following recommendations:

**1. That the Representative for Children and Youth clearly outline what steps are taken and what processes are followed by her Office when addressing requests or inquiries relating to each of its core services.**

Mr. Speaker, during the Committee's proceedings, Members raised a number of questions concerning policies, processes and practices relating to the delivery of services for Nunavut's children and youth at the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. While Committee Members appreciated the Representative's descriptions of processes which may be followed when the Office is contacted regarding an individual advocacy case or when systemic issues are identified, the Standing Committee is of the view that the Office's Annual Reports could be strengthened by providing clear and concise outlines of how cases or reports are handled from the time they present at the Office. The use of schematic diagrams or flowcharts could be useful in illustrating the flow of information and allocation of resources. In addition, the Annual Report could benefit from further clarity and detail with respect to the specific types of activities which support individual advocacy.

**2. That the Representative for Children and Youth establish measures to track the success of her Office in addressing requests or inquiries relating to each of its core services.**

Mr. Speaker, during the first nine months of her term, the period covered by her first Annual Report, the Representative for Children and Youth faced the challenging task of establishing the very basic structure of her Office's operations. While the Committee appreciates that a great deal of work has been done to establish the routines and procedures necessary to carry out the functions of the Office, Members note that it is equally important to put measures in place from the outset that will enable the Representative to evaluate which procedures are effective in reaching their desired objectives and which ones need to be changed or modified to achieve greater success.

**3. That the Representative for Children and Youth continue to explore options for incorporating Inuit culture and Inuit Societal Values into the structure and operations of her Office.**

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee recognizes the efforts made by the Representative for Children and Youth to adapt the guiding principles of Inuit Societal Values into the operations of her office. However, Members questioned the direct relevance of certain values to specific advocacy activities. The Representative is encouraged to continue in her efforts to find alternative approaches within the workings of her office which are representative of Inuit culture and Inuit Qaujimagatqangit.

Members note that a number of child and youth advocacy offices in Canada have developed initiatives which focus on the unique needs and challenges faced by aboriginal children in their jurisdictions. The Committee encourages the Representative to consult with such entities as the Piqqusilirivvik cultural school run by Nunavut Arctic College and the Ilisaqsivik Society which provides wellness counselling in the community of Clyde River, and to take advantage of resources which provide insight into Inuit cultural concepts of parenting and lifestyle as well as taking into account the legacy of historical events and circumstances which have had considerable impact on several generations of Inuit. The Committee encourages the Representative to place particular focus on children and youth who have been victims of trauma and to ensure that her Office recognizes and adopts the principles of Inuit lifestyle counselling.

**4. That the Representative for Children and Youth continue to work towards ensuring that her Office's services are made available in a linguistically appropriate manner.**

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee noted with some concern that there is only one Inuit language speaking staff member in the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. Given that nearly 70% of Nunavut's population have the Inuit language as their mother tongue and that over 50% of Nunavut's population use the Inuit language most often at home, it is critical that individuals seeking to contact the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth are able to do so using the language of their choice. The Standing Committee encourages the Representative to make greater efforts to retain Inuit language speaking staff. In addition, given the sensitivity of the kinds of issues that may be raised, it is important to ensure that Inuit language speakers in the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth are fully proficient and qualified to address matters in much the same way that Inuit language speakers in Nunavut's health care system are trained and qualified to address sensitive medical matters.

With respect to the French language, the Committee was pleased to note that the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth is able to offer services in French.

**5. That the Representative for Children and Youth ensure that her Annual Report is tabled within the deadline specified in the legislation.**

Mr. Speaker, as I noted in my introduction, section 35 of the of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* requires the Representative for Children and Youth to submit an annual report within six months after the end of each fiscal year. The 2014-2015 Annual Report of the Representative for Children and Youth was tabled on May 30, 2016 which was almost eight months past the legislated deadline. The Standing Committee appreciates that during the 2014-2015 fiscal year the Representative was extremely busy in the initial stages of establishing the operational foundations of her Office. However, Members noted that the lengthy delay in tabling the annual report for that year resulted in considerable overlap with the second year of the Office's activities. This in turn led to considerable overlap in the topics that were raised and discussed during the Representative's appearance before the Committee to discuss her Office's activities.

During her appearance before the Standing Committee on September 15, 2016, the Representative for Children and Youth indicated that she again did not expect to meet the legislated deadline for the tabling of her 2015-2016 annual report. The Standing Committee remains concerned with these ongoing delays. The timely submission of reports ensures that the scrutiny, review and recommendations pertaining to each report can be conducted and considered in a timely manner. The Standing Committee urges the Representative for Children and Youth to make greater efforts to meet the deadline for submitting her annual report as it is legislated.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee noted further that, while pleasing to the eye, the heavy use of photographic and artistic images in reports and other such documents often involves additional production time, increased costs and requires the type of printing services that are often not available locally, leading to additional expense and potential delays in shipping and transportation. In the interest of saving time and cost, the Committee encourages the Representative to place greater emphasis on the substantive content of her annual reports.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee commends the Representative for Children and Youth for her hard work in setting up and establishing her Office with a view to providing a comprehensive and effective service for years to come.

Although this Standing Committee report does include recommendations for the consideration of the Representative for Children and Youth, given the amount of time that has already passed since the end of the period which is covered in the 2014-2015 Annual Report, the Committee is not requesting a response to its report.

With that Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Standing Committee be received by the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.