



Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts

Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth

**2nd Session of the 6th Legislative Assembly of Nunavut
Spring 2025 Sitting**

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Introduction and Background

Nunavut's *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was passed on September 17, 2013, by the 3rd Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth officially opened on September 30, 2015.

Nunavut's second Representative for Children and Youth, Ms. Jane Bates, was re-appointed by the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on May 23, 2024, for a second five-year term.

Section 35 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* requires the Representative to prepare and submit an annual report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on the conduct of the office and the discharge of its duties during the preceding year. The Representative has a number of areas of responsibility related to the rights and interests of children and youth, including advocacy and advice regarding government services for children and youth, as well as the administration of the office.

The Annual Report of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth for 2023-2024 was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut on October 24, 2024. The report opened with the Representative's Message providing an overview of highlights in the report and strong words on the issue of child sexual abuse in Nunavut.

The report also included:

- An updated "Status of Young Nunavummiut" data section with analysis, discussion of trends and 16 recommendations to departments based on the Representative's interpretation of the data;
- a discussion of proposed amendments to the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*;
- an overview of individual advocacy cases and systemic advocacy issues addressed by the office, including a recommendation to the Department of Family Services with respect to placement and permanency planning for children and youth in care;
- a description of the office's five-year review of progress made to implement recommendations in the Representative's *Our Minds Matter: Youth-Informed Review of Mental Health Services for Young Nunavummiut* report;
- Advocate's Applause section focusing on the Department of Justice;
- a description of the office's newly developed child rights resources; and
- an overview of the operationalization of the office's Critical Injuries and Death program which came into effect on April 1, 2023.

Televised hearings on the annual reports of independent officers of the Legislative Assembly provide an opportunity for the issues raised in those reports to be discussed in a public forum.

The Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts held its televised hearing on the 2023-2024 Annual Report of Nunavut's Representative for Children and Youth from April 28-29, 2025. The hearing was held in the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly and televised live across the territory. The hearing was also open to the public and news media and was livestreamed on the Legislative Assembly's website. Transcripts from the hearing are available on the Legislative Assembly's website.

Witnesses appearing before the standing committee included the Representative for Children and Youth and her official as well as a number of Government of Nunavut officials representing the Department of Family Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice, including the Chief Coroner of Nunavut. Although the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs was requested to attend, members were advised at the last minute that the Premier had chosen to schedule a cabinet meeting at the same time. As a result, the official from the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs missed the first day of the committee's hearing. The lack of representation from Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs made it difficult to fully address concerns and issues raised on the first day of the proceedings. Although members revisited a number of the same topics on the second day of the hearing to give the Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs official the opportunity to respond, the flow of the discussion had been interrupted and much significant context was lost.

The standing committee extends its thanks to the witnesses who participated in the hearing for their contributions.

During the proceedings, a number of commitments were made by government officials to provide additional information to the standing committee. The committee appreciates receiving some of that information and anticipates receiving the remainder of the information in due course.

Several themes were addressed in some detail during the standing committee's review of the Representative for Children and Youth's 2023 – 24 Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut including: the crisis of child sexual abuse in Nunavut; the role of the Umingmak Centre; the collection and use of data; efforts to improve collaboration and communication; and difficulties faced by families when there are delays in accessing identification documentation for Nunavut newborns.

Child Sexual Abuse in Nunavut

In May of 2023, the Auditor General of Canada submitted a report to the Legislative Assembly on Child and Family Services in Nunavut. The first line of the report read:

“This audit report describes a crisis.”

In response to that report, on May 30, 2023, the Premier of Nunavut issued a press release in which he stated:

“The Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs (EIA) will establish a Government of Nunavut (GN) audit and support function and develop a performance accountability framework. Taking a whole-of-government approach, EIA will provide oversight across departments for services related to the wellbeing of children, youth, and families.”

On May 31, 2023, the Premier rose in his place in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut to repeat this commitment, and stated:

“Mr. Speaker, as children are involved, our response must be swift.”

To date, two years later, a government-wide action plan has yet to be finalized.

It also appears that the government has altered its approach to this issue. On April 29, 2025, during the second day of the committee hearings on the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Representative for Children and Youth, the witness for the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs stated:

“Mr. Chairman, I also understand that when the committee identifies the need for a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut that there is an expectation that Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs will lead that work.

Mr. Chairman, it would not make sense for Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs to lead work on files related to children and youth.”

It should be noted that while the Auditor General of Canada, Nunavut’s Representative for Children and Youth and the Legislative Assembly’s Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts have all identified the urgent need for a government-wide approach to address the crisis at hand, it was the Premier of the Government of Nunavut who made the commitment to do so under the auspices of the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs. It was, therefore, extremely disappointing and disheartening, in view of the topics discussed during the appearance of Nunavut’s Representative for Children and Youth, that the Premier of Nunavut chose to schedule a cabinet meeting which prevented the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs official from taking part in critical discussions on the first day of the hearing.

This lack of respect for committee proceedings is unprecedented.

Following last year's April 2024 hearings on the Representative's Annual Reports, this committee had recommended, in its 2024 Report on the Review of the Representative's 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23 Annual Reports, **that the Government of Nunavut immediately develop a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut.**

The government's formal response to the committee's recommendation, which was tabled on October 25, 2024, stated:

"The GN shares your concern for the safety and well-being of children in our communities. The Government of Nunavut will begin work on a government-wide action plan in line with the Standing Committee's recommendation. An interdepartmental and interagency approach is essential to identify a wide range of collaborative efforts within the government-wide action plan. This approach ensures that all relevant stakeholders are involved and that we leverage our collective resources and expertise effectively.

The GN is committed to working closely with partners to address the root causes and effects of child sexual abuse and violence. Our goal is to create a safer environment for all children in Nunavut and we are ready to collaborate with key partners to tackle this critical issue."

In her "Message from the Representative" section of her 2023-2024 Annual Report, the Representative wrote:

"The Department of Family Services must do better and be held accountable for consistently and accurately documenting all referrals of child abuse so the Government of Nunavut (GN) can understand the scope and magnitude of this issue. Even without child sexual abuse referral statistics from the Department of Family Services, based on our work, I can confirm that child sexual abuse in Nunavut continues to be a crisis. A crisis that has remained knowingly unaddressed."

"My office's paramount priority is for the GN to collectively address the child sexual abuse crisis."

Officials from the key front-line departments of Family Services, Health and Education all agreed that child sexual abuse is a crisis in Nunavut and yet, a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse in Nunavut has not been developed or finalized.

Child sexual abuse is a heavy burden that our territory bears, not only in its current state but as a legacy between generations, compounded by Nunavut's social realities and such factors as residential school experiences and past traumas. The committee agrees that a coordinated and collective approach must be taken to address this crisis and sincerely hopes that government leadership will respond accordingly.

At the beginning of her testimony, the Representative stated:

"I think that I would say, as everyone has indicated, child sexual abuse is a very difficult topic, and it is difficult to speak about. And one of the reasons that child sexual abuse typically is allowed to continue is because of silence. And I think that is because it's difficult to talk about, I think that the government has not necessarily ignored it, but I think it's a topic, it's difficult, how do you tackle it, how do you deal with it. I think that that doesn't excuse the fact that we haven't brought it to the forefront and said hey, here's a problem, here's a crisis and we need to deal with it. I think the how is probably the issue that has probably caused the government some difficulty, because it's not an easy topic. It's not an easy situation, because child sexual abuse occurs in a situation of silence, and that is difficult to break through."

Recognizing the difficulty of the subject matter, Members of the Standing Committee greatly appreciated the level of discussion and the depth of contributions to this topic from witnesses and officials during the hearing proceedings.

The committee appreciates that significant efforts are being made within the respective mandates of the departments of Family Services, Education, Health and Justice to identify, address and prevent instances where children or youth are the victims of abuse, whether it be sexual abuse or other forms of abuse.

As specific examples of these efforts, the committee was pleased to note the Department of Education's commitment to ensuring that staff follow their duty to report any disclosures or suspicion of abuse; the Department of Health's focus on its sexual assault nurse examiner training with 49 of 104 nurses registered for the course having already completed it; the Department of Justice's Victim Services program which ensures that wrap-around support is provided to child and youth victims of crime throughout the criminal justice process; and the RCMP's Special Investigations Unit.

The lack of data on reports and referrals relating to incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect and whether they are being investigated or followed up is a serious concern. Information from such documents as medical records, RCMP reports and court files should be consolidated to fully address incidents of abuse. The committee strongly encourages the Department of Family Services in its efforts to fully operationalize its new Matrix case management system as soon as possible.

As noted by the Representative during her appearance at the hearing:

"You can't address the crisis unless you have the mechanisms and tools in place to investigate it and to lay charges, convictions, and treatment perspectives."

Testimony from the Family Services official addressed the role of the community with respect to awareness and action to address child sexual abuse:

“I would also note, Mr. Chair, that this is something that the government needs to do with community. There is knowledge that needs to be shared. There’s folks that don’t see anything wrong with people undertaking these activities that, in our view, is very wrong. And so I believe there’s a very big educational component that takes the community to understand the pieces around what is right and when is wrong.

The idea of a 12-year-old becoming pregnant is significantly problematic, Mr. Chair, and I think that boils down to having all of these pieces in place, having the capacity to address them but also the educational piece is probably of paramount importance to ensure that young people and adults alike are aware that these activities, although you don’t see anything wrong with them, they are wrong, they are illegal. And we need to raise that awareness as a collective and we need to address through our sexual abuse action plan.”

Witnesses indicated that Nunavut’s *Surusinit Ikajuqtigiit Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement* is currently being reviewed and updated. The committee anticipates that the new version of the agreement will be tabled in the Assembly in due course.

The committee was given to understand that a consultant has now been hired to begin work on a Nunavut *Child Sexual Abuse Action Plan*. Testimony from the Family Services official confirmed that the plan would have components similar to those of Greenland’s strategy against sexual abuse *Killiliisa – Let us Set Boundaries* and will include public awareness campaigns, community champions travelling to communities to encourage people to speak out and assist people with those discussions, and also to conduct voluntary anonymous surveys of the adult population and youth.

The Standing Committee recommends:

1. That, with no further delay, the Government of Nunavut immediately develop and finalize a government-wide action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut and further, that this action plan be tabled in this Assembly before the end of the term of this Assembly;

2. That educational resources and materials to help children and youth navigate the trauma in their lives be developed as a component of the government’s action plan to address child sexual abuse and sexual violence in Nunavut.

Umingmak Centre

The Umingmak Centre is a child advocacy centre in Iqaluit that focuses specifically on the needs of children and youth who have experienced abuse. The facility is established by the Canadian charity Arctic Children and Youth Foundation as a child-friendly space where the RCMP, Child and Family Services and pediatricians can coordinate services.

During the hearing, the committee heard testimony from several witnesses respecting the important role played by this entity in addressing issues related to child sexual abuse.

The official from the Department of Health provided the following description:

“The Umingmak Centre is a very important part or tool in the toolbox in relation to child sexual abuse or other forms of abuse or neglect for children. It is an integrated program or service that is also funded by or supported by other departments than just Health within the government. Not only do they do the forensic sexual assault examinations, but they are a fully functioning clinic for abuse and neglect. They can provide things like onsite pregnancy testing and sexually transmitted infection testing. They have social services as well as medical services. We have a physician that we fund as a pediatrician to work at the Umingmak Centre. They have liaisons or elders that also work with the children and families. They are followed on along a continuum, from what I understand, so it’s not just receive diagnosis and treatment or support services but ongoing services. So a family and children may remain working with the Umingmak Centre for a longer duration and then also be connected to other services, whether those are community services, services within Health, or other departments.”

The official from the Department of Justice provided additional context:

“Investigators from both specialized investigative team work closely with the staff at the Umingmak Centre to ensure that if a sexual assault examination kit, is required it is conducted at the centre with a pediatrician in a victim-centred approach. Arrangements are also made to interview the child at the Umingmak Centre interview room. Once all avenues of investigation have been pursued and information and evidence collected, a decision is made whether or not there is sufficient evidence to effect an arrest. Investigators from the specialized investigative team work closely with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to rely on information regarding the investigation to ensure that the Crown counsel is aware of the investigation and prepared for court proceedings.”

The Representative noted her concern that the role of the Umingmak Centre is not yet fully integrated into the government's approach to address child abuse, stating:

"I also want to circle around a little bit to the Umingmak Centre. The Umingmak Centre is an invaluable resource and it provides a service that is not being utilized enough, in terms of often again when I review individual advocacy files we see that there's a child sexual abuse matter going on, the Umingmak Centre's not involved. And I'm hopeful that, again, also in the new standard and procedure for Family Services the Umingmak Centre is listed as a mandatory, now a mandatory kind of referral in those matters. So I think that this is another piece to the action plan, is putting all the pieces together that I'm a little bit concerned about."

The Standing Committee recommends:

- 3. That the Department of Family Services work to incorporate the role of the Umingmak Centre into the department's standards and procedures and, further, that additional resources be allocated to the Umingmak Centre to enable the delivery of its services in communities outside of Iqaluit.**

Collection and Use of Data

The Representative's Annual Report includes a report on the status of children and youth in Nunavut as required by section 35(1)(a) of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Since 2020, the Representative's Annual Reports' *Status of Young Nunavummiut* chapters have contained data and information sets relating to government services impacting children, youth and families in Nunavut as well as the social context in which those services are delivered. This ongoing collection of data has established a baseline of sorts, making information available for reference and comparison.

In its 2024 Report on the review of the Representative's 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23 Annual Reports for 2020 through to 2023, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts recommended that **the Representative for Children and Youth ensure that analysis of the various data sets published in the Annual Reports is undertaken to determine trends and to inform service delivery providers of areas of growing concern or specific service delivery areas in need of improvement.**

The committee was very pleased to note that the Representative has taken this recommendation to heart. Her 2023-24 Annual Report includes enhanced analysis of the data and discussion of trends relevant to each department. In addition, the Representative provides sixteen recommendations for the relevant departments based on her interpretation of the data and information, including a recommendation that "the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs as the lead, works to ensure current, complete, and accurate statistics are available through the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics."

It was previously noted that Nunavut's Bureau of Statistics faced challenges in producing up-to-date statistics for the territory, leading to gaps in the Representative's report.

During the hearing, the official from the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs responded directly to this issue:

"I'm pleased to tell you that since hiring a Director for the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics, significant progress has been made: Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit has four staffed positions out of six, including the director, a long time staff member located in Pangnirtung, and two casual staff in Iqaluit. Staffing actions for two senior members of the team are nearing completion. We are working to ensure accurate and up-to-date statistics are available on the Nunavummit Kiglisiniartiit website and will continue increasing the data available."

The committee was also pleased to learn through witness testimony that there have been significant improvements in how individual departments share data and information with the Representative's office since its last annual report.

However, concerns remain respecting the development, implementation and use of the Department of Family Services' new Matrix case management system which is intended as the primary vehicle for collecting and consolidating information relating to the protection of children and youth in Nunavut. The ongoing lack of comprehensive, reliable and validated information is of significant concern.

This issue was specifically addressed by the Department of Family Services official:

"Mr. Chair, reliable data is the backbone of an accountable system. In response to gaps identified by the Representative for Children and Youth and the Auditor General, the department committed to improving its information management systems through the phased roll-out of the Matrix Integrated Case Management System. Over the past year, we have made significant strides in how we collect, manage, and apply child welfare data. Phase One of the Matrix Integrated Case Management System has been completed. Phase Two is now well underway. This phase, Mr. Chair, includes the migration of legacy data, improvements to data quality, and a territory-wide retraining initiative for staff. A revised referral coding system has also been implemented, enhancing the accuracy and consistency of data used for decision-making and quality assurance.

We recently implemented a critical incident reporting module in Matrix, which has an established workflow that is a multi-layer approach to reviews and approvals of critical incidents. This quality assurance mechanism is being used to address gaps in practice as well as highlight inaccuracies in reporting. This new method to critical incident reporting will close a gap that the representative has consistently flagged. The launch of our first comprehensive Child Protection Referral Report in February 2025 marked a significant milestone, providing valuable insights into referral data, providing timelines, trends in maltreatment types, and regional variations. Together, these changes are building a more accountable and responsive system, one that supports better outcomes for children and families across Nunavut."

The committee notes that recent reports on Child and Family Services have explicitly excluded data or statistics due to the unreliable, and inaccurate, nature of the information. Although the Representative has commended the department for its 'honesty and integrity' in admitting this failing, it must be rectified.

The Standing Committee recommends:

- 4. That the Department of Family Services ensure that all future reports on Child and Family Services in Nunavut include comprehensive and up-to-date data on services being provided to Nunavut's children and youth.**

Collaboration and Coordination

In its previous report, the committee noted that the Government of Nunavut had established its *Surusitut Ikajuqtigiit Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement*, although it was not clear that the agreement was being implemented by all stakeholders nor that it was being implemented in a coordinated manner. Testimony from witnesses during the hearing indicated that the Agreement is currently being reviewed.

The Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs official stated:

"I want to assure the member that our team is doing all that we can in addressing this. I believe this is where reference to a whole-of-government approach has been referenced and talked about. And in doing that, the intention is always for joint activities across departments and agencies to address a common goal, and in this case, addressing child sexual abuse."

I want to try and remain focused on the positive, that there's acknowledgement and that work is being done, and I recognize that this may not mean something right this moment, but I want to assure you that work is happening. In doing that it involves integrating policy development, program management, and service delivery across government. I have confidence and trust that my deputy colleagues that are sitting here with me through the Child Abuse and Neglect Response Agreement committee is doing exactly that."

Despite such assurances, committee members continue to have concerns that the system currently in place leads to inconsistent access to services.

Testimony from the Department of Education official provided further insight to this issue:

"Child abuse in Nunavut is so broad. It can be comments. It can be physical. It can be, it's so broad. And what the Department of Education – I'm speaking for the Department of Education – what we can do is so limited. We can report a suspected sexual abuse; we can report disclosures. We have the duty to report. And then once that's done we have referred them to the departments, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and that's the extent of our responsibility..."

But I would like to answer your question, is it going unaddressed? I think it's too broad of a statement. I think with every effort and with every good intention there is effort made. What we're not doing is having four departments get together and keep them an open file."

It's over and above our scope, because of privacy issues, but maybe that's something that we need to start looking at, through the action plan of the child abuse strategy in Nunavut."

In her testimony the Representative noted:

"One of the other issues that we see in individual advocacy cases, and certainly we saw it recently in a critical injury review that we did, and it talks about it here, is the coordination or collaboration between departments on various, on follow-up, largely. So there's an issue in front of us concerning a young person and departments have to collaborate, have to communicate to serve that child, youth, and their family. And this is an ongoing issue that we have seen, where the individual advocates will have to step in and get the departments together to start talking so that they are collectively providing those services."

The Representative raised the suggestion of a "reporting back" clause within legislation to ensure follow-up on specific cases, while maintaining confidentiality.

The Representative noted:

"So it in terms of follow-up I can safely say that it's an issue, and I think that that quality assurance mechanism needs to be put in for every department, and a coordinated case management system, and I hate to use the word "system". You have to have coordinated case management so that everybody, and that relies on good communication between the departments and back to the public, back to the person receiving the services."

The Standing Committee recommends:

- 5. That the Government of Nunavut, under the leadership of the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, establish a formal system of interdepartmental coordination that ensures that children and youth in Nunavut receive the care and services to which they are entitled.**

Communication

Creating awareness of the rights of children and youth is an important role of the Representative's office. Members applaud the Representative on her office's work in developing child's rights resources that will eventually be incorporated into a comprehensive child's rights teaching guide that can be used in schools. The committee was pleased to note that the Representative's *Self-Advocacy Workshop* was again delivered to students in a number of Nunavut community schools.

In its May 2024 report, the committee had encouraged the Representative to increase her efforts to consult directly and engage more with children and youth to hear their views and perspectives on some of the key issues of concern respecting services provided by government departments.

The committee had also previously suggested that the Representative for Children and Youth consider establishing a Youth Advisory Council that could function in a role similar to the Representative's Elder Advisor group.

Members were somewhat disappointed, however, to learn that no work had been done with the office's Elder Advisors in 2023-2024 as the appointment terms of the Elder Advisors had all expired.

The Standing Committee recommends:

- 6. That the Representative for Children and Youth seek nominations and appoint Elder Advisors to the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth at the earliest opportunity.**

The committee was pleased to note that the Department of Family Services has established a new Client Relations Office to support families with concerns respecting services provided through its Family Wellness division including child protection and residential care, and to address complaints about services by ensuring compliance with established standards.

The Standing Committee recommends:

- 7. That the Department of Family Services provides regular reports to the Legislative Assembly on the operations of its Client Relations office including details on the types of complaints or concerns received and the responses and actions taken to address them.**

In conclusion, the Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts commends the Representative for Children and Youth and her staff for their steadfast work in advocating for the rights and interests of Nunavut's children and youth.

The committee greatly appreciated the frank and open contributions of witnesses at the hearing in addressing a number of issues raised in the 2023-24 Annual Report of the Representative for Children and Youth.

Members were especially pleased to note the increasingly positive working relationships between the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth and the leaders of Government of Nunavut departments. Testimony at the hearing provided many examples of the professional, caring and compassionate efforts undertaken within the departments of Family Services, Health, Education and Justice in response to questions, issues and concerns raised by the Representative.

Committee members would further like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Nunavut's front-line workers including community social services workers and family resource workers, nurses and health centre staff, teachers and school staff, as well as members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in delivering much-needed supports and services to the children and youth of Nunavut's communities.

The standing committee is requesting that a response to this report be provided to the committee pursuant to Rule 91(5) of the *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut*.