

Supplemental Letter to the Alternative Report of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

July 1 2020 (“Canada Day”)

To the members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child,

The attached alternative report “Close Gaps through Systemic Change: Implement Children’s Rights in Canada” was originally submitted by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) on March 1 2020. Since then, Canada’s experience with Covid-19 confirms the finding of major systemic gaps in protection of children’s rights. As well as exposing the gaps, it reveals the negative impacts and high costs for children and society. Moving forward, it adds to the already compelling evidence in the report that implementing children’s rights would make Canada’s federalist system of governance work better for children, families, and communities across the country.

It is important to acknowledge the scale of the government’s response to the pandemic, which has no parallel in recent Canadian history. Efforts to mitigate the economic impact on families, including an emergency wage subsidy and benefit, and a temporary increase in Canada Child Benefit (CCB) payments, have been tremendously important in safeguarding child well-being in the short- and medium-term. We acknowledge the service of front-line and emergency workers, many of whom have put their health at risk to provide families with some sense of security in uncertain times. Many of our coalition’s member organizations are among these front-line champions for children and families. As a coalition, we recognize the strain on these organizations, who engage in the type of civil society monitoring of children’s rights provided by our coalition on an entirely volunteer basis. During this time of profound economic uncertainty, the relevance of long-term government investment in mechanisms to promote accountability for and attention to children’s rights is evident.

While Canadian governments have made efforts to respond to the current crisis with their available tools, the quality of those tools remains of concern. Officials have been faced with an endless set of decisions about whether to heighten, expand, relax, or adjust pandemic mitigation efforts. Children’s rights have not been properly considered in these moments in the way they could have if more Canadian governments had previously adopted Child Rights Impact Assessments (see section 1.B.1. of our report). When it comes to provincially-mandated services such as education and child protection, responses have varied from one jurisdiction to another—another common theme in our report that could be addressed through a federal coordinating body such as a National Commissioner for Children and Youth (see sections 1.B.2.a and 1.E.). In all areas, children in Canada would have been better positioned to respond to this pandemic if the Committee’s previous concluding observations were properly considered (section 1.A.).

While the impacts of COVID-19 will ultimately engage all articles of the Convention, we draw your attention to some of the most pressing concerns emerging through the pandemic's early stages in Canada:

- The disruption of public schooling in most provinces and territories and the inconsistent transition to remote learning represents an unprecedented threat to the right to education, especially with regard to children with disabilities (see sections 8.A. "Education Systems" and 7.G "Children with Disabilities");
- The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racialized communities in Canada is a children's rights issue with familiar echoes throughout our report, and in particular section 9 "Special Measures";
- Concerning reports of decreased standards of care and a lack of proper oversight for children in alternative care brings further importance to the analysis and recommendations in section 6.A. "Child Welfare";
- The emotional impact of the pandemic on children, which ranges from feeling isolated from social supports to losing a loved one to COVID-19, further exacerbates our concerns with the system of psychosocial support available to young people as detailed in section 7.F. "Mental Health";
- While government action has curbed the worst of the pandemic's immediate economic impacts, the long-term effects on child and youth development remain a significant concern (sections 7.A. "Child Poverty" 7.B. "Food Security" and 7.C. "Social Determinants of Health");
- The fragmented, inequitable provision of early childhood care, without adequate governance and accountability, was unable to respond to the needs of children and essential workers during the crisis and is a major factor in the disproportionate unemployment for women (section 6.B. "Early Childhood Development" and the "Affordable Child Care for All" plans pre- and post-Covid);
- While additional funds for the Kids Help Phone is helpful to address the added vulnerability of children trapped in homes that are not safe, it is a band-aid solution for violence against children, while the unnecessary delay in implementing changes in family law, cited as progress in the report, raises questions about the priority being given to the best interests of children (sections 5.A. "Ending All Forms of Violence Against Children" and 2.B. "Best Interests of the Child.)
- In relation to the points above, the risks to children's rights are further exacerbated by anticipated government austerity measures, including cuts to already compromised social service systems (section 1.C. "Allocation of Resources/Budgeting").

We chose the title "Close Gaps through Systemic Change" because too many children and youth were falling through the gaps before the pandemic. Moving forward, it will no longer suffice for Canadian governments to suggest that the current system works well enough. As a resident of a marginalized urban community hard hit by COVID-19 was quoted, "the experience of the virus in [our neighbourhood] is just an extension of the daily experience of living in [our neighbourhood]." If any good can come from this pandemic, let it be a Canada that promotes and protects rights equally, and for all.



We thank you again for your consideration of this alternative report.

Sincerely,

The Board of Directors and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

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