



Real change = more time with vulnerable families

CASe Notes



A BULLETIN FOR OPSEU MEMBERS IN CAS

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“Restructuring in the absence of meaningful funding and staffing is only window dressing – or worse, camouflage for underfunding... If Kathleen Wynne wants to be bold about fixing the system, she needs to build it up, not blow it up. And the first step in building it up is to start listening to the province’s dedicated and caring child protection workers.”

- OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas

The call for professional regulation

In February 2015, the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) produced a final report of the Professional Regulation Working Group (PRWG) entitled *“Towards regulation: Child protection and professional regulation in the province of Ontario.”* The report recommended that the child welfare sector move toward a regulated workforce. This change would require that child protection workers be reclassified as “social workers” or “social services workers” to meet the criteria for membership in the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Services Workers (OCSWSSW).

The College’s mandate is to protect the public through a complaint and investigations procedure. Any member of the public can file a complaint against an individual classified as a social worker or social services worker.

Historically the position of the various unions who represent members in the sector has been that child protection workers are already subject to a multi-tiered oversight system and that a requirement for membership into the OCSWSSW should be enforced through legislation. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services has not indicated that it would contemplate legislation at this point.



OPSEU's sector position on professional regulation

1. No other profession is held to account by the employer (CAS agency) and two additional independent provincial bodies.

Individual complaints against workers can be filed under three separate and distinct bodies:

- The Children's Aid Society (employer)
- The Child and Family Services Review Board (*Child and Family Services Act*)
- The Office of the Provincial Child Advocate (complaints are considered after they have passed through the existing complaint bodies, Child and Family Services Review Board, and the CAS's internal complaint process).

2. Under the current oversight system, child protection workers can be investigated, disciplined and sanctioned simultaneously and separately by three distinct bodies. Adding a fourth complaint mechanism is more about appearance than substance.

The OACAS has acknowledged that regulation is about fostering greater public confidence at a time when child protection has come under tremendous scrutiny following the Report of the Auditor General (2015), and recent Coroner's Inquests into child deaths. Providing the public with a fourth complaint mechanism sidesteps the critical systemic issues that need to be fixed and instead places the regulatory burden on individual workers.

3. After two decades of restructuring, child protection workers don't need more regulation. They need more time to work with vulnerable children and families.

Frontline workers have been making a case for years that they now spend most of their time meeting the needs of paperwork instead of the needs of clients. Over the years, Coroner's Inquests have recommended that workload be addressed and yet there has been no system-wide Ministry-led change on this critical issue. A child-centered approach needs to rebalance the distribution of work. The Ministry needs to fund an increase to frontline worker positions in order to be able to provide service that places children at the centre of care.

4. Strengthening public protection in child welfare should be about addressing marginalization and poverty.

The OACAS should be at the forefront of advocating for programs and resources, together with community partners, that will support families to succeed; such as accessible mental health and addiction treatment services, quality subsidized housing, universal childcare, free transit, and social assistance rates above the poverty line. The clients that come into contact with CASs are at greater risk of harm from these structural problems, which increase the likelihood of higher rates of involvement with the child protection system.

Authorized for distribution by:



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Children's Aid Societies