

For Immediate Release

Event Date: Monday, October 05, 2009 -- 10:00am



The Foster Care Council of Canada

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Press Release Date: Thurs. October 01, 2009

Rally Information: www.rally4accountability.webs.com

RE: ONTARIO NDP LEADER TO SPEAK ON NEED FOR OMBUDSMAN OVERSIGHT OF CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Toronto (Queen's Park) Monday, October 05, 2009 - 10:00am

The Foster Care Council of Canada would like to announce that the leader of Ontario's NDP party, and the party's child-welfare opposition critic, Andrea Horwath, will speak on the front lawn of Queens Park in Toronto at what is called the "*Rally 4 Accountability*", an annual event which seeks to obtain external oversight of the province's 53 Children's Aid Societies by Ontario's Ombudsman, Andre Marin.

Horwath has repeatedly introduced Bills which seek to amend the *Ombudsman Act* giving the Ombudsman authority to investigate decisions, acts, or omissions done during the administration of Children's Aid Societies, which are private, individual, non-government corporations.

Ombudsman, Andre Marin has been very public with his expressions of concern regarding the lack of independent oversight of Children's Aid Societies in Ontario. He has expressed his concerns to MPP's during committee meetings at the Legislative Assembly, in press releases, and within at least two of his office's Annual Reports, where he reports that Children's Aid Society "*child protection policies and practices -- which if flawed can literally be a matter of life and death for a child -- are still not subject to investigative review or rigorous complaints systems.*"

Marin also reports that "*serious cases where children are being hurt or in danger will continue to fall through the cracks -- and families will have nowhere to turn for independent investigative help.*"

Everyone across Ontario who has lived in foster care, along with their family members, supporters, and professionals who have dealings with child-welfare services are invited to attend, listen to guest speakers, sign petitions, and to participate by taking turns on the podium during 'Open Mic' to share their stories and experiences in the hope of gathering support for external accountability of Children's Aid Societies through Ombudsman oversight.

Everyone is invited to attend!

Guest speakers, followed by an open mic, include:

- Andrea Horwath, Ontario NDP Leader and Child Welfare Opposition Critic
- John Dunn and Richard Bertrand, former foster children and directors of the *Foster Care Council of Canada*
- Dorian Baxter, a parent who successfully sued a Children's Aid Society staff with negligence, incompetence, and malicious prosecution who runs Canada Court Watch
- Sheila White from MPP Andrea Horwath's Office
- Andrew Skinner from Fighting 4 Families (Rally Organizer)
- Steve Rudd - Church of Christ
- Kris Titus - Fathers for Justice
- Mary Janiga - Child Assist Services

PUBLIC CONTACT:

For further information you can call the Foster Care Council of Canada at (613) 220-1039 or visit the rally website by googling "Rally For Accountability"

Additional Information:

John Dunn, a former foster child who is now the Founder and volunteer Executive Director of the *Foster Care Council of Canada*, an organization which works to increase the transparency and accountability of child-welfare services says "*any time people mention the need for truly independent oversight of Children's Aid Societies by an external body such as the Ombudsman, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) quickly responds saying there are a multitude of accountability mechanisms in place, sometimes listing them off, without ever revealing any of the systemic problems these accountability mechanisms discover, if they have been resolved and how.*"

The OACAS is a powerful, private organization made up of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies, which among other things, advocates for and speaks out on behalf of the agencies, lobbies government, and engages in child-welfare research for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The OACAS receives millions of dollars a year directly from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and, in addition to that government funding, the OACAS charges over \$2 Million dollars annually in 'membership fees' to Children's Aid Societies from money the

Ministry intended for child-welfare services. Last year, the OACAS paid over \$3 Million dollars in salaries to it's staff alone.

The OACAS, the Children's Aid Societies individually, and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services actively withhold information from the public pertaining to systemic problems in the child-welfare system permitting them to continue to occur while cloaked under the guise of "confidentiality" and "the best interests of the child".

If the Ontario Government's Ministry of Children and Youth Services were to permit the Ombudsman to have oversight of Children's Aid Societies, doing so might empower his office to look into, and report publicly on these important systemic problems, hopefully preventing more harm from coming to Ontario's children and their families where that harm is not necessary. Instances of harm to children and families involved with Children's Aid Societies often get settled out-of-court with gag orders preventing victims from discussing the details of the settlements."

Sincerely,
John Dunn

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Dunn', is positioned below the typed name.

Founder, Executive Director
The Foster Care Council of Canada