



OFFICE OF THE YUKON CHILD & YOUTH ADVOCATE
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November 27, 2024

The Honourable Jeremy Harper
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
and Chair of Member Services Board
Jeremy.harper@yukon.ca

Re: Government Interference with Independence of the Child and Youth Advocate

Dear Speaker Harper,

As Yukon's Child and Youth Advocate, I am compelled to bring to your attention my concerns of political interference by Yukon Government in the legislated budget approval process for the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (YCAO). These actions threaten the independence of a Yukon's oversight body and could undermine public confidence in my ability to hold government accountable as intended by law.

Section 22 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* is explicit in outlining the budgetary process: the Advocate submits the budget estimate to the Members' Services Board (MSB), MSB reviews and approves the estimate, and the approved estimate is then transmitted to the Minister of Finance for recommendation to the Legislative Assembly. This process, followed for the past decade of my tenure, safeguards the independence of the Advocate's Office and ensures it is adequately resourced to fulfill its legislated mandate.

Recent interference by the Department of Finance in dictating reductions to budgets approved by MSB directly contravenes this legislated process. Management Board's involvement in scrutinizing making recommendations on budgets already reviewed and approved by MSB is a troubling departure from established practice and constitutes political interference. This interference not only undermines the legislated authority of MSB but also has the appearance of a conflict of interest, as Cabinet is effectively directing reductions in budgets – and hence the scope of work – of an office mandated to hold government accountable. The Advocate's Office protects the rights of children and youth, a role that is critical to supporting good governance for Yukon's most vulnerable citizens.

My office exercised fiscal responsibility in preparing the YCAO budget, mindful of the financial constraints currently faced by the territory. The budget presented to and approved by MSB on September 16, 2024, reflects what is required for the YCAO to operate effectively for the upcoming year. Arbitrary reductions beyond those already approved by MSB create uncertainty in planning, disrupt operations, and diminish the ability of the YCAO to fulfill its mandate to uphold the rights of children and youth eligible to receive government services.

I respectfully call on the Legislative Assembly to uphold the established process. The budget approved by MSB on September 16, 2024, must be implemented without further interference. Failure to adhere to the legislated process risks diminishing public trust in the independence an oversight body and threatens the integrity of governance in our territory.

As the Advocate appointed by the Legislative Assembly, I am steadfast in my commitment to fulfilling my responsibilities as outlined in the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. I urge the Legislative Assembly to ensure that the independence of house officers is respected and upheld.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annette King". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Annette King
Child and Youth Advocate
Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office

c. Members Services Board