

## News release

For immediate release

---

### **The Québec Ombudsman's report on parents' financial contribution towards the placement of their child under government charge**

#### ***A framework to review and practices to standardize***

**Québec City, March 25, 2013** – The Québec Ombudsman's report published today indicates that the administration of parents' financial contribution towards placement of their children under age 18 must be reviewed and that youth centre practices in this regard must be standardized.

#### **Context**

In Québec, between April 1, 2010, and March 31, 2011, 20 623 children under age 18 were lodged in substitute environments (foster families, youth centres, intermediate resources). The government covers the cost of placement. However, parents are required to contribute financially towards part of the cost of room and board. The Québec Ombudsman is not calling into question parents' obligation to make this contribution. It agrees fully with the importance of maintaining parent responsibility during placement. That said, it has noted that the *Regulation respecting the application of the Act respecting health services and social services* and the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux policy, which govern administration of the contribution, are obsolete and their application differs from one youth centre to another. The result: inconsistency and unfairness.

#### **An obsolete administrative framework**

Neither the regulation nor the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux policy regarding the contribution have been adjusted to factor in changes to the family benefit system over the years. The contribution rate still takes into account a benefit (baby bonus) that has not existed since 1997 and ignores the fact that since 2005 there has been a new measure (child assistance) that replaces family benefits, the non-refundable tax credit respecting dependent children, and the tax reduction for families.

This administrative framework is not in line with the fiscal reality of families today and has not kept pace with advances in youth protection. This has led to inconsistency and unfairness. Here are two examples:

- The child support that parents must pay to an ex-spouse is not considered in calculating the debtor's contribution towards placement (this means that these parents pay child support ***and*** the financial contribution);

- Only the parent (mother or father) of a child who is placed is required to make the financial contribution, even if he or she does not have actual charge of the child (e.g. a grandfather has charge of his grandson and receives the child assistance payment for the grandson, who is lodged temporarily in a youth centre. It is the father who must pay the financial contribution towards placement. If he fails to do so, the grandfather will not be entitled to the child assistance payment even though he continues to provide for the needs and maintenance of the placed child).

### **The impact of disparities in practices on parents and children**

In the course of the investigation it conducted, the Québec Ombudsman found sizable disparities in how youth centres apply the Regulation and the policy governing the contribution, in particular in terms of billing, negotiating agreements with parents who have trouble making the contribution, and collecting from parents in default. These differences are not only prejudicial to parents because they are treated differently depending on which youth centre is concerned, but they can also have an impact on their children. The Québec Ombudsman saw that rather than maintaining or strengthening parent-child relationships, some practices fuel conflicts between the parents and youth centre employees, which, ultimately, can adversely affect a child's return to his or her family environment.

The Québec Ombudsman recommended that the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, the Régie des rentes du Québec, the Agence du revenu du Québec, and the Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie act so that the financial contribution:

- insofar as possible, is harmonized with changes in the fiscal measures to support families;
- is more consistent with youth protection principles;
- contributes more effectively and fairly to the achievement of the objective of maintaining parent responsibility and parent participation in the funding of the services provided to their child who is lodged in a substitute environment.

The summary of the Québec Ombudsman's report is posted on its website at [www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](http://www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca), under the "Cases and Documentation" tab, "Investigation Reports and Special Reports" section.

- 30 -

#### **Source:**

Québec Ombudsman

#### **Information and requests for interviews:**

Carole-Anne Huot, Communications Adviser  
(418) 646-7143/ (418) 925-7994

Joanne Trudel, Communications Manager and Associate Secretary General  
(418) 644-0510/ (418) 580-9259  
[joanne.trudel@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](mailto:joanne.trudel@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)

[www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](http://www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)