



**For Immediate Release
April 12, 2018**

Children's Aid Societies Welcome OHRC Report, Take Action to Combat Over-representation in Child Welfare

TORONTO—The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and Children's Aid Societies (CASs) welcome the Ontario Human Rights Commission's report, *Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare*. The report shines a light on the complex and multi-faceted issues that have contributed to over-representation in child welfare. We are aware of this issue and we have begun the work to address it.

The report acknowledges that racial disproportionality is not conclusive of discrimination by CASs. However, we acknowledge the tremendous negative impact it is having on these communities. Even without fully reported data, we know these disparities and disproportionalities must be addressed. OACAS and CASs have developed distinct approaches to change the way we work with Indigenous families and African Canadian families.

"Historical and current child welfare practices have resulted in over-representation of Indigenous children in child welfare," said Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS. "But those practices have also led to cultural genocide for the Indigenous people of Ontario. We have a long path towards Reconciliation and healing of these historic injustices."

In October of 2017, OACAS and Ontario's non-indigenous CASs publicly apologized to the province's Indigenous families and communities affected by both the 60s Scoop and on-going harmful child welfare practices. We made nine Reconciliation Commitments aimed at addressing over-representation, disparity in outcomes for Indigenous children, and the return of jurisdiction of child welfare to Indigenous communities. OACAS will be reporting progress on these commitments back to Indigenous communities this year.

"The apology was an important part of child welfare's Reconciliation journey," said Karen Hill, OACAS Director of Indigenous Services. "However, it was only a moment on the path. As the OHRC report suggests, action to help these families is the true measure."

For decades the African Canadian community in Ontario has been raising the alarm about the damaging impact child welfare has on their families. African Canadians have called on child welfare to make significant changes, and we are responding.

"The over-representation of African Canadian children in the child welfare system is unacceptable," said Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS. "The disparity in outcomes for these children also needs to urgently be addressed, and we believe the One Vision One Voice program has started that vital work."

Aligned with *A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti Racism Strategic Plan*, OACAS, through One Vision One Voice, and in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the African Canadian community, is working with Children's Aid Societies to implement 11 Race Equity Practices. These practices will combat over-

representation, address disproportionality, and eliminate the disparities experienced by African Canadians engaged with child welfare.

“The OHRC report highlights the need for the sector to move forward with the recommendations outlined in the One Vision One Voice Practice Framework,” said Kike Ojo, Program Manager for One Vision One Voice. “The vision is that the Human Rights of African Canadian children and families in this province will be maintained and valued within child welfare.”

Child Welfare Professional training, delivered by OACAS, has also undergone extensive updates to change and improve how frontline workers and leadership work with these two communities. The Child Welfare Pathway to Authorization series, which is mandatory for all new workers, addresses topics such as equity, human rights, anti-racism, and has updated Indigenous content. OACAS has also promoted equity as a core leadership competency and developed supports for Children’s Aid Societies to build leadership on issues such as systemic oppression, equity, and disparity and disproportionality.

We recognize that our current identity-based data is incomplete. We acknowledge that the way we collect the data is inconsistent and in some instances potentially harmful to the children and families we serve. We must and we will do better.

In September 2017, in collaboration with MCYS and the Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton, OACAS launched an identity-based data collection course for child welfare workers and supervisors. This mandatory online training helps agency staff recognize the role of data collection in supporting equity of service outcomes and provides strategies for collecting demographic data in a sensitive, respectful, and anti-oppressive manner.

OACAS and CASs are committed to working in partnership with MCYS, the Anti-Racism Directorate, and the OHRC to ensure identity-based data is collected consistently across the province. We recognize this data will aid in understanding the inequities in the system and help provide solutions.

Most importantly, OACAS and CASs are committed to working directly with the children, youth, families, and communities who are over-represented in child welfare to find culturally appropriate solutions to these urgent problems. We will continue to make the changes needed to realize an equitable child welfare system for all families in Ontario.

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About the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies: Since 1912, OACAS has represented Ontario’s Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario and provided service in the areas of government relations, communications, information management, education and training to advocate for the protection and well-being of children. <http://www.oacas.org>.