



The Honourable Todd Smith
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Hepburn Block
6th Floor
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

April 1, 2021

Dear Minister Smith,

Youth Justice Ontario (YJO) understood the need for a Youth Justice Modernization strategy however, we wish to formally communicate grave concerns in the way in which the process was carried out by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). Youth in 26 closing youth justice facilities were transferred within hours of the facilities learning of the closures. Vulnerable youth – including those with severe mental health issues - were removed with no notice to them, or to their families, and without any opportunity for staff to prepare them for the move.

This process was not in keeping with the principles of the MCCSS' own Youth Justice Framework and was counter to YJO's therapeutic and youth-centered approach. It is hard to believe that this apparent disregard for the youths' wellbeing would be sanctioned in any other part of the child and youth system in Ontario.

YJO members proposed meaningful and necessary service provision in these underutilized facilities, at no additional costs, to meet the needs of our most vulnerable youth, but that was not undertaken. YJO also offered to share their expertise in preparation for closures to ensure that the needs of local youth, families, and communities continued to be met while changes were implemented. Instead, MCCSS proceeded with abrupt and disruptive closures that caused significant negative and long-lasting impacts on the youth and staff members. The intensive treatment plans of youth with very complex needs were abruptly interrupted as a result of the way MCCSS proceeded with these closures.

The resulting closures have depleted the Province's infrastructure to support our most vulnerable and disenfranchised youth. Youth in northern Ontario are disproportionately impacted by this decision. Intergenerational trauma has contributed to them being in the justice system and how they were removed from facilities has caused even more trauma. We know that the rates of mental health issues in the youth justice population are as high as 90 per cent, with one quarter requiring a specialized, significant and immediate treatment response. Sadly, there is now nowhere else for these adolescent boys and girls, who are disproportionately Black or Indigenous, to receive the proven clinical treatment required to meet their needs.

These closures, without proper consultation and planning, represent continued acts of systemic discrimination and perpetuate the inequities that contribute to the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth, racialized youth, and youth with serious mental health issues in the criminal justice system.

Transfer Payment (TP) agencies are continually expected to do more with less resources, and now even more so as the demands on remaining programs are rising. The MCCSS is showing no collaborative effort to address the real pressures facing TP agencies delivering critical services, and no additional supports to those programs and youth in need.

YJO is requesting a meeting with Minister Smith to discuss solutions needed to address these imminent issues.

Respectfully,



Melanie Bania
Vice-President, Youth Justice Ontario

cc Hon. Doug Ford, Ontario Premier
David Mitchell, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. Janet Menard, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. Doug Downey, Minister of the Attorney General
Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health
Teresa Armstrong, Member of Provincial Parliament, London-Fanshawe
Opposition Critic for Children and Youth Services