

Union-management "Blue ribbon" day warns of crisis in children's services

TORONTO, Nov. 17 /CNW/ - Union and management at Ontario's children's aid societies and children's mental health agencies announced that National Child Day, November 20, will be their "Blue Ribbon Day" to warn that some agencies may soon be unable to fulfill their obligation to protect at-risk children due to provincial government indifference.

"Layoff notices and preparations to declare bankruptcy at some children's aid societies mean the clock is already ticking and the countdown to disaster has begun," said Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, (OPSEU), at Queen's Park today.

"The government claims it's doing the best it can, but when so many agencies are facing deficits and some are even planning layoffs and bankruptcy filings, it's a warning that children could be hurt," said Sid Ryan, President of the Ontario Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

In an unprecedented joint initiative, management and unionized staff at children's aid societies and children's mental health agencies will mark National Child Day this Friday, November 20, by wearing blue ribbons and distributing message bookmarks to the public warning that children are in danger if the government does not act soon.

"Without sufficient funding, it will not be possible for children's aid societies to respond to high-risk child abuse allegations within mandated timelines," said Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS).

"Research shows that five out of every six children who need specialized help for mental health problems are not getting any," said Gordon Floyd, Executive Director, Children's Mental Health Ontario (CHMO). "And those who do seek help, face an average wait time of five and a half months."

York Region Children's Aid Society issued layoff notices to 18 staff on November 10. Payukotayno James & Hudson Bay Family Services will run out of operating funds December 16 and has sent layoff notices to all 120 management and front line staff. Kenora-Patricia Child and Family Services will issue layoff notices on November 18 and will run out of operating funds in the third week of December.

OPSEU and CUPE represent 11,000 workers at children's aid societies and children's mental health agencies. The OACAS represents 51 of the province's 53 children's aid societies. CHMO represents 81 children's mental health centres.

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