



NEWS RELEASE

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Advocacy Groups Call on BC Representative for Children and Youth To Review Centralization of Girls' Imprisonment

Three prominent rights organizations in B.C. have joined to ask the Representative for Children and Youth to review the B.C. Government's proposal to transport all girl prisoners across the province to the Burnaby youth prison. The government announced on Wednesday the centralization of the detention of girls, and the imposition of a new "sheriff escort" system that will transport girls from all over the province to the Burnaby youth prison.

"The Ministry of Children and Families will subject girls to hours of transportation in shackles, and further isolation and displacement from their families and communities. Some of these girls will be enduring 11 or more hours of transportation in shackles, and many before they have been found guilty of a crime. Not only is this an outrageous violation of children's human rights, it also amounts to cruel and unusual punishment and will surely be constitutionally challenged" said Annabel Webb, Director of Justice for Girls. "The consequences of this kind of displacement on girls can be dire. Two Aboriginal girls committed suicide in 2010 while incarcerated in Manitoba; both girls had been displaced many kilometres from their home communities," adds Webb.

"Beyond the simple fact that it is discriminatory and illegal that boys get to stay in regional centres, and girls have to ride with a sheriff on shackle tours for hundreds of kilometres away from their families, we can't understand how the government reconciles goals of re-integrating these children with their home communities and proposals of 'video conferencing' with families," said David Eby, Executive Director of the BC Civil Liberties Association.

"Passage of Bill C-10, with its increased reliance on detention for youth, is sure to increase youth incarceration rates," says Laura Track, Legal Director at West Coast LEAF. "Aboriginal girls are vastly over-represented in BC facilities, representing over half of girls in youth prisons, and these cuts will harm them and their families most of all. Separating girls from their families and communities is bad policy and will be especially damaging to girls from isolated and remote parts of the province."

The organizations' letter to the Representative for Children and Youth asks the Representative to investigate the government proposal and to intervene, alleging that the conditions of girls' imprisonment are inherently degrading and dehumanizing and that proposed centralization by the Ministry of Children and Family Development will exacerbate human rights abuses against girls in BC youth prisons.

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