

FOR RELEASE

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CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES BILL TABLED IN THE HOUSE

WHITEHORSE – Legislation to improve protection and care of all Yukon children was tabled in the Yukon Legislative Assembly today.

The *Child and Family Services Act* replaces the 24-year-old *Children's Act* and, subject to legislative approval, will mean changes to child protection and adoption laws in Yukon.

"The new draft bill brings together best practices from across the country in one piece of legislation that is truly a piece of Yukon legislation that will protect our children, and support our families and assist parents," Health and Social Services Minister Brad Cathers said.

The new act contains several themes including support, inclusion and accountability and reflects the priorities and advice of First Nations and the Yukon public.

Support will be provided for families and extended families to care for children; to parents to fulfill their parental role; and planning and service delivery to meet the unique needs of families and children.

The new act also recognizes the importance of culture and community in the lives of children and families; and the importance of involving First Nations in planning and decision-making where First Nations children are involved in child protection matters.

"The act is written in clear, straightforward language and includes a range of measures to prevent the need to take children into care. The act emphasizes a cooperative planning process to ensure that family and others involved in the child's life are included in important decisions," Cathers said.

Changes to the bill were made in response to concerns raised during the most recent consultations, including a commitment to establish a Child Advocate, with its own governing legislation.

"We have spent the past five years coming to this day. We have met with First Nations, children previously in our care, social workers, children's advocates and specialists in the area of child protection from across this country. I am satisfied that this legislation is a significant step forward and makes Yukon a leader nationally in the area of child welfare," Cathers added.

The bill is targeted for enactment by October 2009. This will allow adequate time to develop regulations and complete preparations for implementation.

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