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**CHILD AND YOUTH CARE**  
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**D'ÉDUCATION SPÉCIALISÉE**

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### **OACYC Statement on Hamber/Cooney Court Case - May 2026**

The Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care extends its deepest condolences to the family, kinship networks, community members, and all those impacted by the tragic deaths of the children at the centre of this case.

We acknowledge that these children were Indigenous. Their lives, identities, families, cultures, and connections mattered. Their deaths must be understood within a broader context that includes the ongoing impacts of colonialism, systemic racism, intergenerational harm, and the continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children, youth, and families within systems of care, protection, mental health, and child welfare.

As an Association rooted in Child and Youth Care practice, we hold grief, accountability, and reflection together. When children and youth are harmed in systems intended to protect and support them, the sector has a responsibility to look carefully at the conditions, structures, policies, and professional frameworks that shape care.

This responsibility is directly connected to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action 1 to 5, which speak specifically to child welfare and the safety, belonging, and rights of Indigenous children and families. These Calls to Action urge governments and child-serving systems to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, keep Indigenous children connected to their families and communities, publish transparent data on child welfare involvement, fully implement Jordan's Principle, enact child welfare legislation that affirms Indigenous jurisdiction and cultural continuity, and develop culturally appropriate parenting and family support programs.

For Child and Youth Care, these Calls to Action are not abstract policy recommendations. They apply directly to the everyday systems where Indigenous children and youth live, learn, receive care, experience crisis, and seek belonging. They remind us that care must not be separated from culture, identity, family,

language, land, community, and self-determination. They also require the sector to confront the ways child welfare and adjacent systems have contributed to family separation, institutional harm, and the erosion of Indigenous ways of caring for children.

This is a complicated and multilayered space. Child and Youth Care Practitioners work across children's mental health, child welfare, education, youth justice, residential care, community services, family support, developmental services, crisis response, and many other care environments. These are not simple systems. They involve overlapping mandates, different funding models, complex workforce realities, and children and families who often arrive carrying significant histories of trauma, loss, displacement, and unmet need.

Within this complexity, the OACYC Board of Directors believes that Ontario must continue working toward a meaningful, sophisticated, and culturally responsive pathway to regulation for Child and Youth Care Practitioners across all care spaces where children, youth, and families receive support.

Regulation alone will not prevent every harm. It is not a single solution to deeply embedded systemic failures. However, regulation can help strengthen public protection, clarify professional accountability, support consistent standards of practice, reinforce ethical obligations, and create clearer expectations for those entrusted with the care of children and youth.

In the context of Indigenous children, youth, families, and communities, regulation must also be understood through the lens of reconciliation. A regulatory pathway must support cultural safety, transparency, public accountability, and the right of Indigenous children to remain connected to their families, communities, cultures, and identities. It must not reproduce colonial oversight or impose a one-size-fits-all model of care. It must be developed with Indigenous leadership, community voice, and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, caring, belonging, and healing.

The OACYC is calling for thoughtful collaboration with government, Indigenous partners, sector leaders, educators, employers, regulators, and other key stakeholders to support a pathway forward. This work requires resources, consultation, humility, and sustained commitment. It also requires recognition that Child and Youth Care Practitioners are already embedded in some of the most vulnerable and complex areas of Ontario's child- and youth-serving systems.

Children and youth deserve care that is relational, ethical, culturally responsive,

accountable, and safe. Indigenous children and youth deserve systems that uphold their identity, culture, language, family relationships, community connections, and inherent dignity. Families and communities deserve confidence that those providing care are held to clear professional standards. Practitioners deserve a regulatory framework that reflects the realities, responsibilities, and depth of their work.

The OACYC Board of Directors remains committed to advancing this conversation with care, respect, and urgency. We honour the lives of the children lost, and we recognize the responsibility carried by all systems, organizations, and professionals involved in the care of children and youth in Ontario.

**Sources:**

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