

# Canadian kids need own commissioner, Garneau urges <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

OTTAWA - Canadian kids need a voice, according to Liberal MP Marc Garneau.

Garneau's new private member's bill, tabled Thursday in the House of Commons, aims to give them one by creating a federal commissioner for children and young persons.

The role of the commissioner, he said, would be to act as "the conscience of Canada" on matters relating to the country's young.

"The whole idea of having a commissioner is to, in a sense, put a little bit more emphasis on watching over children because, ultimately, children are voiceless," said the MP for the Montreal riding of Westmount-Ville-Marie. "They have no rights."

The mandate of the commissioner's office would range from advocacy to monitoring programs and evaluating both new and existing laws.

A variety of situations could fall under the commissioner's purview, Garneau said, from what happens to children in a divorce to the treatment of young offenders.

Most Canadian provinces and territories already have child and youth advocates, representatives or ombudsman services. The North West Territories, Nunavut and Prince Edward Island do not.

Several organizations and advocates have previously called for a federal children's commissioner, including UNICEF and British Columbia's representative for children and youth.

Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, which Garneau called "an important step."

Bill C-420, the Commissioner for Children and Young Persons in Canada Act, would give extra oversight, he said.

But oversight comes at a cost.

By way of comparison, operations for the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada were estimated at more than \$5.2 million in 2011.

The bill states that the commissioner will be paid the same amount as a federal court judge. As of April 12, a federal court judge's salary is \$288,100.

"In the grand scheme of things, costs would be trivial," Garneau said.

More important, said Garneau, is what children and young people mean to a country.

"Most Canadians, I think, regard how we behave as a democracy in part by how well we treat our young children," he said. "So I think this bill would be something that most people would support and welcome."

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**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

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