

Alberta government wants ideas for a children's charter: Aims to reduce poverty and improve early learning across the province ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Albertans should share their wide-ranging expertise this summer to help the government put children first, says Human Services Minister Dave Hancock.

The government launched a consultation process Wednesday called Together We Raise Tomorrow, intended to collect ideas that will contribute to a new children's charter and to new strategies to reduce poverty and improve early learning across the province.

"Our whole province benefits when children are safe, healthy and happy, but it is a sad reality that some of the children in our province do not have access to the supports and opportunities that can help them achieve their dreams," Hancock said Wednesday in the Jasper Place Parent Link Centre at 16811 88th Ave.

"Today, we're taking another progressive step by launching Together We Raise Tomorrow, to develop the necessary strategies to reduce poverty, improve early childhood development and create a children's charter for Alberta."

The effort will use online conversations and community meetings this summer and into the fall to gather opinions from Albertans that will add to the rich research and resources supporting Alberta's kids, Hancock said.

"We need to tap into the expertise and the passion and the connections in the community," Hancock said.

"The goal is to integrate and improve the supports that we have so that all children can reach their full potential.

Last month, Hancock introduced Bill 25, the Children First Act. The new law initiates a review of all policies, programs and services affecting children and requires the government to establish a "children's charter" to guide decision making.

"It's all about focus," Hancock said.

"A children's charter is just one way of bringing that together and saying this is really important to us. What are the values that we need to look at? What are the things we need to do to make sure children get a good start? Putting it right out there so that we can point to it and people can focus on it, people can test us against it and what they're doing against it."

The government hopes to have a draft charter ready in late fall that can be introduced in the legislature in the spring, Hancock said.

Education Minister Jeff Johnson said the work will build a strong foundation in the early years for Alberta's kids.

"What this effort and this engagement are all about is coming closer together to celebrate all the good work that we do, but also to talk about how we can better co-ordinate our efforts and to make it even better. By doing that we can help ensure children, from their very earliest years, get the start they need to enjoy a long, healthy, fulfilling and successful life as Albertans.

People can sign up to participate in the Together We Raise Tomorrow discussions at www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca ^[2]

-reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

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