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CHILDREN AND YOUTH



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News Release

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Commissioner and representative call for co-ordinated, comprehensive cyberbullying strategy

VANCOUVER – The provincial government should develop a comprehensive, cross-ministry strategy to both prevent and mitigate the effects of cyberbullying and educate children and youth on digital citizenship, say two independent officers of the British Columbia Legislature.

That is the lead recommendation out of a joint report by the Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Representative for Children and Youth. *Cyberbullying: Empowering children and youth to be safe online and responsible digital citizens* was released today during the OIPC's Privacy and Access 20/20: Future of Privacy Conference in Vancouver.

The report provides important context on the issue of cyberbullying and clearly illustrates the complexity of the problem, using first-hand input from B.C. youth, a review of relevant literature and a look at what is being done to tackle cyberbullying in other jurisdictions. Focusing on how the issue can best be addressed in B.C., the report also recommends that the Attorney General consider developing prosecution guidelines for the application of criminal law to cyberbullying that best reflect a child-centred approach and that fully consider the broader impact of criminalizing children and youth.

The officers also recommend that the Ministry of Education ensure learning objectives about cyberbullying and digital citizenship are part of the re-designed provincial curriculum when it is fully implemented in B.C., that teachers receive professional development on the subject and that cyberbullying be incorporated into mandatory school codes of conduct going forward.

“Children and youth spend so much of their lives online and on social media, which means cyberbullying has the potential to affect thousands of young lives in a variety of negative ways,” said representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. “Our report shows that there is still much to be learned about cyberbullying, but we are able to conclude that B.C. needs a child-focused, evidence-based approach that includes strong prevention and education components. This will require attention from the ministry of education and Attorney General but, to be most effective, we recommend a single point of accountability within the provincial government.”

“An effective response to cyberbullying is multifaceted and includes education and lessons about good digital citizenship,” said information and privacy commissioner Elizabeth Denham. “The answer is not to take technology away, or to introduce invasive surveillance tools to monitor our children. Instead, we need to teach them how to behave online in a way that is respectful of others, and empower them to express themselves responsibly.”

While calling on government to lead the strategy, the report also acknowledges the proactive roles that social media companies can and should play regarding cyberbullying. The officers recommend that social media companies that reach into B.C. develop policies and processes to assist children, youth and families to have personal information removed that has been inappropriately posted.

The full report can be viewed here: <https://www.rcybc.ca/cyberbullying>

<https://www.oipc.bc.ca/report/special-reports/>

Media Contacts:

Jeff Rud
Executive Director, Communications
Cell: 250 216-4725
Jeff.rud@rcybc.ca

Cara McGregor
Communications Director
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
250 217-5535
cmcgregor@oipc.bc.ca