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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Some young people are planning for back to school.
Others fear losing housing and services in a pandemic.**

Ottawa, ON – It's September, and while many young people are preparing for back to school, those in the child protection system who are at or nearing the age of majority are worried they will need to make involuntary life transitions in the middle of a pandemic. They have reason to worry.

Youth in child welfare abruptly lose support from the state when they reach the age of majority, regardless of their readiness, and their emotional and financial needs.

Youth who are forced to make life transitions before they are ready and without family supports face negative outcomes, including a heightened risk for homelessness, poverty, and poor mental health.

The existing system is deeply inequitable. First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Black, racialized and LGBTQ2S+ youth, and young people with disabilities are experiencing the greatest harm.

Responsible parents are not requiring their children to take their first steps towards independence in a pandemic, nor are they fully withdrawing supports when their child is ready to make big life transitions.

Most governments currently have temporary moratoriums in place that are allowing thousands of youth to shelter in place and access programs and resources they would have otherwise lost.

But there are no moratoriums in Quebec, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island. And unless British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia extend their moratoriums, youth will transition into very uncertain and unsafe situations this fall, in the middle of an expected second wave of COVID-19.

The federal government recently extended their moratorium to March 2021, agreeing to continue to provide critical supports to First Nations youth who would otherwise be aging out of the child protection system during the pandemic. That's good news, but many, many young people still face uncertainty.

We've reviewed 30 years of recommendations from youth and youth advocates, including a newly released report on [Transition Supports to Prevent Homelessness for Youth Leaving Out-of-Home Care](#). One thing is clear: it's **time to implement a coordinated Canada-wide response to support youth transitioning out of child welfare**.

We've said this before, but we'll say it again – governments and agencies serving young people should immediately implement the following urgent measures:

- 1. Work with youth in care networks and their national partners to develop policy and practice guidelines for fully supported transitions out the child protection system – into alternative government supports or into community – as a condition of lifting moratoriums.**

During the pandemic, youth in care who have reached the age of majority should have the option to remain in their current placements and receive supports – no files should be closed, nor should any services be withdrawn, including access to extended care workers and supports that would otherwise be conditional on being in school or in a training program. We thank those who have implemented moratoriums on transitions out of child welfare thus far and urge those who have not yet done so to immediately implement this important measure. The moratoriums that have already been put into place offer governments the opportunity to redesign responses to life transitions for youth in care without placing additional youth at risk. We are ready to help.

2. Provide free accessible mental health services immediately and maintain family and cultural connections for youth in and from care.

Youth are particularly vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) triggers due to isolation – youth need their family, relations, and community supports more than ever. We call on governments and agencies serving young people to pursue regular meetings between youth, caregivers, and social workers; to **protect and promote family and cultural connections**, especially for First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth, and Black, racialized and LGBTQ2S+ youth who are overrepresented in care; and to provide free mental health supports (i.e. comprehensive universal counselling services, and access to psychologists, psychiatrists and Elders) both in person (with proper precautions) and using phone, online chat and video conferencing to maintain continuity of connection.

3. Offer supports required for survival, with no eligibility criteria or conditions attached.

Respect the intention of moratoriums by imposing no conditions or criteria on youth who choose to remain in care or to leave care despite moratoriums. Youth who have been in care should have immediate access to housing and financial support for all necessities, including rent, groceries and medications. Youth with disabilities should have access to additional resources that meet their specific needs. No arbitrary cut off date should be imposed on these essential services, with a “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach being implemented to ensure young people with a precarious status are not left behind.

Governments should provide access to bridge funding for all former youth in care, those who are leaving or have recently left detention, and those in precarious housing situations. Funds should be made accessible for youth who have been in the child welfare system irrespective of age and without intrusive documentation processes.

4. When young people come to you seeking housing and services, do not turn them away

The risk of placement abuse and intimate partner violence increases with physical distancing measures. Young people in and from care that are looking for alternative placements and safer housing arrangements should be protected. Child welfare agencies should continue to check in with young people and reach out to those living independently, being prepared to take action to address unsafe situations.

Youth shelters and housing providers should be granted flexibility and supported to create alternative arrangements to ensure young people can remain housed. **No young person should be turned away from housing.**

All governments should immediately suspend evictions if they have not already done so – many young people in and from the child welfare system may not have a safe or adequate home to go to.

#StandWithYouthInCare. Tell your elected representative that all young people deserve safe and supported life transitions and that you want them to work with the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, and First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to co-develop a framework for fully supported transitions out of the child protection system, into alternative government supports or into community, as a condition to lifting moratoriums.

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About the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates

Out of concern for the safety and wellbeing of youth in and from the child protection system, youth in care networks from across the country and their allies are coordinating their efforts to secure moratoriums on youth transitions out of child welfare and redesign how young people are supported to make safe, healthy and fulfilling life transitions into community.

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