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NUTAQQANUT INULRAMIRNULLU
UQAQTIKHAANIK

REPRÉSENTANT DE
L'ENFANCE ET DE LA JEUNESSE

REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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March 19, 2020

The Honourable Joe Savikataaq, Premier of Nunavut
c/o John Quirke, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
P.O. Box 1200, 926 Federal Road
Iqaluit, NU, Canada X0A 0H0

Dear Premier,

I would like to offer my support regarding the recent decision to temporarily close schools and recreational centres, in an attempt to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19. These measures are necessary to reduce the impact a potential outbreak could have on children, youth, and communities across the territory.

While the precautions being taken have the health and wellness of all people in mind, it is important to recognize that all decisions regarding the outbreak and protective measures, have the potential to have both positive and negative impacts on the territory's most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

I encourage the Government of Nunavut to continue prioritizing the best interests of children and youth as strategies are implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19. I recognize the due diligence recent decisions have required and am requesting that you consider the factors below as you make further decisions.

Income security: The temporary loss of income, resulting from business closures, may affect the income security of families. This may result in the need to forgo expenses associated with meeting basic needs such as nutritional food, health, housing, and safety.

Housing: A lack of infrastructure and high rates of overcrowding makes it challenging to properly isolate individuals who may have been exposed to the virus.

A child's right to protection: The temporary closure of schools and recreational facilities, and the cancelation of recreation activities has the potential to increase the vulnerability of young people and further exacerbate the increasing number of young people who are left unsupervised. Additionally, the increased stress and isolation many families feel during this time of uncertainty, has the potential to result in increased physical, mental, and emotional neglect and abuse to family members.

A child's right to nutritious food: Children and youth across the territory are heavily reliant on lunch and breakfast programs offered at school. Alternative solutions must be found in order to ensure access to nutritious food is possible for the territory's most vulnerable young people. It is also essential that the transport of food to all communities is uninterrupted.

About the Representative for Children and Youth's Office (RCYO): The RCYO is an independent child and youth advocacy office that ensures the Government of Nunavut supports and protects the rights and best interests of young Nunavummiut. Please visit our website at www.rcynu.ca

A child's right to adequate health care: Ensuring safe access to all medical services, including mental health services, during this time remains critical for children, youth, and their families. Additionally, taking precautions to ensure the safety of service providers should also be prioritized.

A child's right to education: A young person's education is not only received in the classroom, but also through the passing on of skills from family and community members. Temporary school closures have created an opportunity to support the sharing and teaching of life skills and it is important that the government continue to support these measures and provide information on how to implement these opportunities safely. We also encourage the government to ensure school staff are continuing to provide resources for students to continue their academic studies outside of the classroom.

A child's right to information: We encourage the Government of Nunavut to continue to provide updates through effective channels. Access to timely, accurate information may help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and any fear and anxiety that may stem from times of uncertainty. These updates should provide information about how to stay safe, and ways to support children, youth, families, and communities during temporary facility closures and reduced government services.

Thank you for your consideration of these areas of concern. Your leadership and timely action to address these concerns while supporting the best interests of children and youth across the territory is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Bates". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jane Bates

Representative for Children and Youth