

The Gazette

Kids need more from government in changing world

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Canada's children need a dedicated advocate, writes Penny Rankin.

I commend Michael LaBelle of the West Island Assistance Fund and Michael Leclair of the Projet Communautaire de Pierrefonds for their April 24 [opinion piece in The Gazette](#) highlighting the vital importance of upholding Canadian children's fundamental rights to food, housing and education.

These rights are not only essential for the well-being of individual children but also for the strength and cohesion of our society as a whole. I fully agree with their argument that ensuring the fundamental rights of children and youth is key to building a stronger Canada.

Despite Canada's status as one of the world's wealthiest nations, we are not adequately supporting our youngest citizens. According to UNICEF Canada, [Canadian children rank 30th out of 38 wealthy countries](#) in overall well-being, with significant concerns about their mental health, physical health and life satisfaction. This ranking underscores the urgent need for bolder public policies and greater commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of every child in Canada.

The newly elected Liberal government must fulfil its obligation to make substantial efforts in implementing these rights domestically, regardless of constitutional jurisdictional challenges, and improve policies to ensure compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Canada ratified in 1991.

While LaBelle and Leclair rightly emphasize the vital importance of access to food, housing and education, it is equally critical to address children's access to medical care, including mental health services, as well as the urgent need for legislation to protect children from online harm.

These intertwined rights to access (health care, education and basic needs) and protection (from physical and digital harm) are enshrined in the CRC — an agreement that obligates the government to uphold every child's right to an adequate standard of living, health care and safety from harm both offline and online.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regularly reviews Canada's progress and has consistently expressed concern about the lack of a dedicated federal body, such as a Children's Commissioner, to oversee and advocate for children's rights. Organizations such as UNICEF Canada, Children First Canada and the National Council of Women of Canada continue to advocate for this, pointing out that despite the nation's wealth, the well-being of Canadian children lags behind that of their peers in other countries.

There have been more than seven attempts by parliamentarians and senators to establish an independent, non-partisan Children's Commissioner with a strong mandate to monitor the implementation of the CRC and protect children's rights in Canada. This role would ensure that a forward-looking perspective is applied when developing policies affecting children.

As for whether Canada is obligated to meet its commitments, I refer readers to the Senate's 2007 report, "[Children: Silenced Again.](#)"

As vice-president of children and youth for the National Council of Women of Canada and incoming president, I affirm our continued advocacy for the creation of a Children's Commissioner. We urge policymakers and the media alike to prioritize this issue.

Protecting children's rights — including their safety online and in daily life — deserves attention. The CRC provides a clear framework: children's rights must guide every decision affecting them, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met. Canada's children need a dedicated advocate.

The well-being of Canadian children is not only crucial for future prosperity; it is also essential in the present. Widening income and social inequalities can dull our sensitivity to the plight of the over [1 million children currently living in poverty](#). Regrettably, we are often numbed by numbers, even those showing that Canada has one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide in comparison to other countries.

Commitment to upholding children's rights today matters. It's time to stand on guard for Canada's children.

Penny Rankin is vice-president of children and youth at the National Council of Women of Canada. She lives in Montreal.