

Chapter 28

Social Services—Placing Minister’s Wards in Permanent Homes

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By December 2020, the Ministry of Social Services implemented our last outstanding recommendation about its processes to place children that are Minister’s wards in permanent homes. The Ministry places children on its Central Adoption Registry within 120 days, or has adequate reasons for the delays.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Under *The Child and Family Services Act*, the Ministry is responsible for planning for the long-term development of permanent and long-term wards, including their placement in permanent homes that provide a safe and nurturing environment.¹ Permanent homes may include placement with extended families, long-term foster families, or adoptive families.

After a child becomes a permanent ward, and the 30-day appeal period has passed, the Ministry has 120 days to register the child for adoption. At December 31, 2020, the Ministry had 389 permanent wards in its care.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This audit follows up on a recommendation about the Ministry’s processes to place the Minister’s wards in permanent homes we first made in our *2013 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 14. We initially made seven recommendations to help the Ministry strengthen its processes.²

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry’s progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry’s management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

We interviewed key Ministry staff, reviewed policies and procedures, and tested a sample of case files of children who became permanent wards between January 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020.

¹ When children have remained in the care of the Ministry for more than 18 months, they may become permanent wards or long-term wards of the Ministry, based on court orders. Long-term wards are children that are unlikely to be adopted, because of the age of the child or other circumstances.

² Our *2015 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 31 reported the Ministry implemented four of the seven recommendations. Our *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 32 reported the Ministry was making progress towards implementing the remaining three recommendations. By December 2018, as reported in our *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 39, the Ministry had implemented two of the three outstanding recommendations.



3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This chapter sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at December 31, 2020, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

3.1 Children Placed on Adoption Registry as Required

We recommended the Ministry of Social Services follow its established policy to place those children whose permanency plans includes adoption on the adoption list within 120 days. (2013 Report – Volume 1, p. 173, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 17, 2014)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry places children on the Central Adoption Registry within 120 days, or has adequate reasons for the delays.

In October 2019, the Ministry revised its adoption planning policy, and the timeframes for registering children on the Registry.³ After a child becomes a permanent ward, and the 30-day appeal period has passed following a permanent order, the Ministry has 120 days to register the child for adoption, or complete an 'Exception to a Plan for Adoption/Adoption Deregistration'.⁴ The revised policy also allows for two 90-day extension periods in cases where registration for adoption cannot be completed within the initial 120-day period.

Between January 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020, the Ministry had 73 new permanent wards. For the 10 case files tested, we found:

- Two children had Exception to a Plan for Adoption forms completed and will not be registered for adoption (i.e., adoption was not in the best interest of the child)
- Three children were placed on the Registry within 120 days or had an approved extension period
- Five children were not placed on the Registry within 120 days or the approved extension period, but had reasonable explanations for the delays (e.g., new Federal legislation, Ministry preparing and approving a foster family that is going to adopt the child) documented in its IT case management system or the child's paper case file.⁵

Placing children on the Registry as early as possible increases their chance of being adopted, especially for older children as their chances for adoption may be lower.

³ The Ministry has a Central Adoption Registry which lists all children available for adoption.

⁴ The Exception to a Plan for Adoption form is used when it is determined that adoption is not in the child's best interest. For example, a child is being cared for by family and will remain with the family instead of being placed for adoption.

⁵ In January 2020, the Federal Government introduced Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. It is aimed at keeping Indigenous children and youth connected to their families, community and culture, specifically as it relates to the provision of child protection services. It includes provisions that allow for Indigenous groups/communities to create policies, procedures, and practices regarding the planning for their children. For example, the new Placement of Indigenous Children form is now required to be on file before the child can be registered for adoption.