Government must act to end racism in children’s aid system: Editorial


The Ontario government now has even more evidence, if it needed it, that Ontario’s children’s aid system is plagued by problems of race. It’s high time for it to act.

The evidence is detailed in a two-volume report from the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies that backs up what the Star reported as long as two years ago: four in 10 children in the care of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto are black in a city where only 8 per cent of children are. Worse, the problem is not just in Toronto, but throughout the province.

But despite a growing chorus of concerns from leaders of the black community, Ontario’s human rights commissioner and its advocate for children, the Liberal government has yet to act on the injustice that can, in the words of the report, “destroy” black families.

Indeed, at a meeting held to discuss it last week, Ontario’s children’s minister, Michael Coteau, refused to promise any funding to implement the report’s 18 important recommendations to address issues of racism in the system. This is unacceptable.

As the province’s advocate for children and youth, Irwin Elman, said: “You can’t just walk away now from this report.”
You need to provide resources.”

Still, Coteau would say only that he will order all 47 children’s aid societies in the province to collect race-based data as part of an effort to reduce the disproportionate number of black kids in care. And he promised that the government will amend the Child and Family Services Act to modernize children’s aid societies to make them more accountable and transparent.

While these moves are both welcome, the government must go further. It must invest in the changes called for in the report, such as providing anti-racism training to everyone from society staff to foster and adoptive parents. Otherwise children may continue to be taken from their homes simply because their parents are poor or society staff are tone-deaf to African-Canadian cultural practices.

The report’s authors, all leaders in the black community, hope to encourage children’s aid societies and the groups most likely to report abuse, such as teachers and police, to work together to provide counselling and support that will keep families together while keeping kids safe. In turn, they argue, that will provide a significant social return — from strengthened families to fewer young people swept up in the criminal justice system.

But it will take government funding to support the recommendations that are aimed at ending racism, ignorance about poverty and cultural misunderstandings. And it will take more financial support to provide parents with the services they need, whether it’s to get back on their feet financially or to learn about what disciplinary measures are acceptable in Canada.

It’s not just black children and families who will benefit from the report’s recommendations. Seeing child protection practices through a “race-equity” lens will create a child welfare system that better reflects and can better serve the province’s increasingly diverse population. For example, it may well shed light on why it is that that indigenous kids are two-and-a-half times as likely to be taken into care as are white kids.

The authors of the report have done a remarkable job of pinpointing both the root of the problem and potential solutions. The government should lose no time in putting in place policies and funding to end this disgrace.
Doug Ford’s simplistic solution to declining math scores won’t work
Ontario’s elementary students are falling behind in math but Ford’s simplistic solution — going back to teaching basic math by memorization — isn’t the answer.

Attacks on John Tory’s leadership against Doug Ford are grounded in style more than substance
It’s easy for critics to attack Toronto Mayor John Tory for not sounding tough enough, but those critiques really come down to style far more than substance.

Martin Regg Cohn: Never mind the charter, Doug Ford has diminished our democratic norms
Ontario’s premier believes democracy is solely about elections, disparaging civil society as “activist groups,” insisting that judges should know their place, Martin Regg Cohn writes.

Shawn Micallef: CBC’s Baroness Von Sketch is funny and familiar to Toronto audiences
In a city where countless productions have dressed this place up to be somewhere else, it remains a welcome but rare case of Toronto getting to be Toronto, Shawn Micallef writes.

Edward Keenan: On the absurdity of Doug Ford causing crises, then holding himself out as the solution
Ontario’s premier would have you believe transit is not being built for Toronto. Not true. It is. His transit folklore is meant to illustrate the paralyzing political dysfunction Ford says besets city council. But the only time that has been on show was during the tenure of his brother Rob Ford as mayor, writes Edward Keenan.

Patrick Corrigan: Donald and Doug
Premier Doug Ford trying to save the legislation that will downsize Toronto council

Bill 31 will not be debated Saturday because under the complicated standing orders, or rules, not enough time will have passed before that can begin. But if the Tories opt to sit Sunday then second-reading debate could begin.

Three court cases aim to return the updated sex-ed curriculum to classrooms

Meanwhile, Ontario teachers will follow the old curriculum, which was in use before the internet and social media came to play a significant role in kids lives, and which does not discuss LGBT issues.

Toronto has had a starring role in hundreds of movies. These 12 were the biggest

Hollywood doesn’t come to Toronto just for TIFF — film and television production in the city has become big business, with major films such as Suicide Squad, The Incredible Hulk and Shape of Water all shot in Tofino. Which ones were the biggest and most successful? We crunched the numbers.

Trudeau government suggests most Canadian marijuana users and employees won’t face problems at U.S. border

A spokesperson for Bill Blair, the Canadian minister of border security, suggested that the government does not expect large-scale U.S. hassling of people after legalization takes effect.

Planning to smoke up in the park when cannabis becomes legal? Here’s what the police say

Toronto force clarifies that there is no wiggle room on the question of public consumption of recreational pot. But many police officials say we can expect some discretion.