



**Minister's Response to the
Family Violence Death Review Committee's
Third Case Review Report**

March 2018

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Background

The Family Violence Death Review Committee (FVDRC) is a multi-disciplinary, expert body, composed of individuals who have extensive knowledge or experience in the area of family violence. The FVDRC was established under the *Protection Against Family Violence Act* (PAFVA). Under section 16 of PAFVA, its role is to:

- (a) review incidents of family violence resulting in deaths; and
- (b) provide advice and recommendations to the Minister respecting the prevention and reduction of family violence.

The FVDRC's third public case review was of a case from 2010 whereby two children were murdered during a court-authorized, unsupervised weekend visit. The parents of the children were in an on and off-again common-law relationship for more than eight years. One parent was the primary caregiver, while the other worked (often out-of-town) to support the family. During this time, there were continual disputes related to the custody, access, supervision, and parental discipline of the children.

In order to frame their recommendations, the FVDRC examined three main themes in this case:

- The current tools used by service providers can help identify the existence of family violence; however, they do not indicate the level of risk which would support more appropriate interventions.
- Service providers need access to unified information for critical decision making that does not rely solely on client self-reporting, which may not be reliable, complete and/or timely.
- Prescription drug abuse and misuse was extensive in this case. The existing technology could be better utilized to integrate health information that can be accessed by a variety of health professionals to make informed medical decisions for the safety and well-being of the individual.

Responses to the Recommendations

We would like to thank the Committee for their report on this case, marked by such loss and heartache. Preventing cases such as this is at the core of the work that the Government of Alberta does to keep children safe. We have made a number of changes to the way we work with families in the years since this tragic incident, including improved supports to help frontline staff critically consider risk assessments.

As part of recommendation number one, the Government of Alberta accepts the recommendation that ongoing training at regular intervals be mandatory for front-line staff.

- Building staff capacity and knowledge will always be a priority for the Ministry of Children's Services. This will continue to evolve as new information and approaches emerge.
- There are current enhancements to staff training underway including how to address family violence as a component of Foundations of Caregiver Support training designed for caregivers, agencies, and frontline staff.

As part of recommendation number two, the Government of Alberta accepts the recommendation to adopt the widespread implementation of integrated family violence courts in Alberta, in consultation with the Family Court Intersection Committee regarding the implementation of the integrated courts.

- There are currently several court houses throughout Alberta that have Integrated Family Violence Courts and work is currently underway to improve the operation of the domestic violence court in Edmonton.

The Government of Alberta also accepts the recommendation to develop or upgrade software in the Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench systems to:

- Allow the civil and criminal systems to share information and identify proceedings and orders, especially with cases involving family violence, custody issues, and child protection concerns between/among the Provincial Court and Court of Queen's Bench systems.
- In the absence of new systems or upgrades to current systems, it is recommended that mandatory manual searches for multiple proceedings and previous orders in all court systems be completed, and that a mandatory formal information-sharing arrangement between court systems be put in place, so that this information is provided for judicial consideration in advance of proceedings.
 - The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General will be exploring opportunities to enhance information sharing between the criminal and civil systems.

Conclusion

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We value the recommendations provided by the FVDRC as they provide valuable insight into the work this government does to improve the lives of the most vulnerable Albertans. The Ministers of Community and Social Services and Children's Services will be meeting with the Committee to discuss these recommendations in more detail.