



Special Report to Parliament: Focusing on the 'Uncontrollable' Child

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The Office of The Children's Advocate (OCA) in March submitted a special Report to the Houses of Parliament. The Report: *Focusing on the Uncontrollable Child: Recommendations to the Houses of Parliament*, was table in the Senate on March 15.

Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon Harrison, in her foreword of the Report noted that "these recommendations are evidence based and attempt to present a practical snapshot of the situation in its current form. It is the view that this approach should assist members of the Honourable Houses of Parliament to appreciate the dilemma and the urgency of the situation."

Among the proposals is for the setting up of a facility for children, who exhibit maladaptive behaviour patterns, and who need special services geared toward addressing the underlying causes.

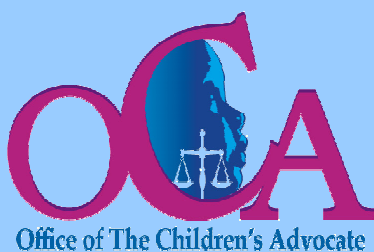
The Report noted that "the OCA recognizes that the situation with female wards...is a more complex



(L-R) Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon Harrison addresses a press conference held to discuss the finding of the Report. She is joined by Deputy Children's Advocate, Henderson Downer, and Public Education and Special Projects Manager, Nicole Hayles.

one than that of boys. This is so because there is no remand facility for girls and the overwhelming majority of the children who are deemed 'uncontrollable' are girls."

The document further stated that "the cohort of wards who are categorized as 'uncontrollable' are perhaps the most vulnerable and as such, this is the immediate grouping being highlighted in these recommendations...(so) that the Parliament will be able to take definitive steps within the short term to improve the conditions which will impact upon these children who have been labeled 'uncontrollable'." *Continued on page 3*



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OCA forwards Vanessa Wint case to Special Coroner



Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon Harrison

The OCA completed its investigation into the circumstances which resulted in the death of sixteen (16) year old ward of the State, Vanessa Wint, at the Horizon Adult Remand Centre in St. Andrew on November 21, 2012. The teen died while in the custody of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS).

Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon Harrison, noted that the OCA's team of investigators conducted a thorough review of the evidence collected, which included witness statements and a variety of documents. The investigation also included numerous visits to the Horizon facility.

Consequent upon the findings of the investigation, Mrs. Gordon Harrison has referred the matter to the Special Coroner for determination.

"As with all matters this Office investigates we are not at liberty to discuss the finer details at this time. I can say confidently however, that my team of investigators conducted a detailed probe into the circumstances surrounding the matter, and such findings have been submitted to the Special Coroner who will determine if based on the evidence the OCA has presented, Vanessa Wint's death occurred as a result of an act or omission by an agent of the State."

"I am aware that Vanessa's death has reignited the heated discourse throughout much of society, and has heightened calls for a separate facility for girls. The OCA maintains that this issue must remain a priority," Mrs. Gordon Harrison added.

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Children's Advocate, Diahann Grodn Harrison, addresses the media. Looking on is Deputy Children's Advocate, Henderson Downer.

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The Report stated that the therapeutic facility identified for children with maladaptive behaviour should be appropriately staffed with forensic psychiatrist, forensic nurses, counselling and clinical psychologists.

The Report also noted that in very extreme cases, where the court determines that the child is best suited for placement in a correctional facility, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) should undertake a complete psychiatric and psychological assessment of the child.

In relation to girls in adult detention facilities, the OCA recommended that these girls be professionally assessed by mental health experts to determine whether there are underlying traumatic experiences that have caused the behaviour.

Another recommendation is that suitable safe houses be identified and equipped with the suitable security features, so that they may accommodate the present cohort of girls who have been placed in adult facilities for uncontrollable behaviour.

The Report said that any child, who is alleged to be 'uncontrollable' by his or her parent, or one who has care, custody and control of such a child, should necessarily be subjected to an assessment by a forensic psychiatric professional.

The Children's Advocate in the Report told Parliament that "I commend these recommendations to you and trust that they will serve as a basis upon which to chart a course that will ultimately improve the lot of these wards. I also hope that they will act as a catalyst toward a much needed solution."

Investigation findings forwarded to Director of Public Prosecutions

Following the conclusion of an investigation by the OCA into a report concerning a 16 year old male ward of the State at the Metcalfe Street Juvenile Remand Centre, the Office forwarded its findings to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for a determination concerning criminal culpability.

The incident related to reports which surfaced in the media on January 5, 2013, that the male ward had suffered injury at the hands of one of the institution's Correctional Officer. It was reported that the Correctional Officer struck the juvenile to the ear.

Children's Advocate, Diahann Gordon Harrison, noted that while the details of the investigation will not be discussed in public as it is currently before the DPP for a ruling, Mrs. Gordon Harrison said "persons charged with the care and protection of our children must exercise due diligence at all times. It is understandable that some of them are working under quite strenuous and difficult circumstances, but anyone who is involved in any aspect of service delivery to children must realize that there are certain standards with which we must all comply in the execution of our duties. Equally, I call on all well-thinking Jamaicans to not prosecute this matter within the public domain, as due process must take its course."



The OCA extends best wishes to all students sitting GSAT.

Stay calm, keep focused, and in all you do strive for your best!

