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May 8, 2011

Chatham-Kent Children's Services
495 Grand Avenue West
Chatham, Ontario N7L 1V5
Tel: (519) 352-0440
Fax: (519) 352-4152
Attn: Ms. Lisa St. Pierre

Dear Ms. St. Pierre

My decision to leave the care of the Chatham-Kent Children's Services

Please be advised that I have decided of my own free will not to return into the care of the Chatham-Kent Children's Services effectively immediately. I am safe at the home of my aunt ██████████ and do not wish to be harassed or intimidated by CAS workers. I have been in care of Craigwood Youth Services in Ailsa Craig based on a voluntary consent. I have felt threatened and unhappy for a long time living under the care of the CAS and feel that returning to live with my family is a better option for me. I am also 15 years of age and will be 16 in August and it is my understanding that I have the right to speak up for myself and to make certain choices for my own future as long as they are reasonable.

I left my current CAS group home with Craigwood Youth Services without prior notice to staff or to CAS workers as nobody with the CAS has listened seriously to me up until now and I felt that I would likely be subjected to threats, intimidation or some form of punishment if I was to make my intent to leave the CAS known beforehand as I have been punished in the past for attempting to exercise by lawful rights or to report incidents where staff have broken the law. As you are aware, I was assaulted last week by another resident which resulted in assault charges being laid against the other resident. I don't feel safe in care.

Over the time I have been in care of CAS I have been the subject of a number of unpleasant experiences which have caused me to deeply distrust the CAS. I have gone AWOL on a number of occasions and the reason for going AWOL was because I hated the way I was being treated. Some of my experiences while in care of CAS include the following:

Craigwood Youth Services – Ailsa Craig (Latest placement)

- 1) I have been physically assaulted by staff workers while in this facility. Of course, I am unable to prove my claims as there are no witnesses, no cameras and no audio recording devices permitted in the facility to prevent such evidence being captured. Based on my observations staff are more than willing to cover up wrongdoings for each other.
- 2) Recently staff blocked the doorway when I told them that I was going out to use the phone to call my mother. After staff physically blocked my way at the door, I was thrown on the floor and physically restrained by three staff members. This physical assault against me all because I said that I was going to walk into town to use the phone to call my mother

because I was being denied dinner and being denied use of the phone. This is a terrible abuse of power when CAS workers can get away with assaulting a teen just for wanting to call their family but this is what staff do on a regular basis to ensure that residents cannot report some of the abuses to those outside of the facility.

- 3) While I was in care I have witnessed CAS workers intimidate the residents. As an example, one time a CAS worker told me to take a punch at him and to see what would happen. The actions of this worker were clearly intended to provoke with the consequences being that the resident will be restrained and likely charged by police they react to the provocation by staff.
- 4) While in CAS I was told that I had to take medications. I was not informed of my rights at the time nor was I informed of the health risks. When I was forced to take the medication, I felt sick and not myself. Later on when I refused to take the meds which were making me feel ill, I was punished by CAS staff for not taking the medications. It is called, "med refusal." If a resident refuses to take medication they are denied food and all privileges.
- 5) Residents are not allowed cell phones. I have a cell phone that my aunt gave me for emergencies. I have never abused any privileges with a cell phone, yet I am being denied the use of something which most other teens in the community have the right to use. I was denied the right to enjoy my own property.
- 6) Cameras are not allowed in the facility nor is anything with a recording device attached. I believe that the real reason why cameras and recording devices are not permitted is so that no evidence can be gathered of some of the wrongdoing going on inside of these CAS facilities. Kids are being abused and the truth of what goes on is being hidden from those on the outside.
- 7) Residents are forced to empty their pockets when they come into the group home as if they are criminals. These facilities are supposed to be homes, not jails. If the CAS workers want to detain children against their will and treat the kids like criminals then don't call them "homes." The CAS facilities are not like homes at all and more like a jail.
- 8) I have never been advised my rights. I am 15 years of age, yet nobody had told me of my rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. CAS has gone to court to make me a Crown Ward before I am 16 years of age, but no one with CAS has ever explained to me my right to make my own choices, especially when I turn 16. It seems like the CAS workers do not want me to know too much information about my rights and to make me a Crown Ward before I am 16 years of age.
- 9) I feel that schooling being provided by the CAS is substandard. The school I attend is located in a garage at Craigwood Youth Services which has been converted into a school on the CAS property. Only CAS children attend this school. The school never gives any homework. There is little or no opportunity to meet non CAS children. All the bad kids are kept together which I do not think is good either.
- 10) On one occasion an officer came to Craigwood to investigate a complaint. Staff called me out of my room. When I standing at the top of the stairs, the officer told me to come downstairs. As I was heading down the stairs, I asked the officer why he needed him to come down. The officer told me not to mouth off and to get down the stairs now. The officer came up the stairs and grabbed me and pushed me against the wall and told me to quit mouthing off. When I spoke to staff about how the officer had assaulted me, staff just

laughed and said that they didn't see anything. It seems those in a position of power and authority cover up for each other inside of these CAS facilities. When kids in care of the CAS are abused by persons of authority, it's easy to understand when these kids get out why they disrespect CAS and police.

- 11) The CAS have applied to the court to make me a Crown Ward of the Society, yet nobody from the CAS has ever asked me if I wanted to be a Crown Ward or explained to me as to why this would be in my best interest. Based on my experience in care, it is not in my interests to stay in the care of the CAS any longer.
- 12) Milk is restricted and residents are not allowed to have milk as recommended under the Canadian food guidelines. How can CAS be claiming to provide a good environment for children when kids have to sneak milk. Even worse is when children get punished if they get caught for drinking milk. If you have milk on your cereal you are not allowed to have a glass of milk.
- 13) I often sit in my room for hours with not much to do. The environment in the CAS group home is simply not very stimulating.
- 14) My children's lawyer has done little to help me up until now. She has not put information before the court that I wanted her to such as my letters to the judge.
- 15) Mealtime is anytime between 4:30 to 8:30 at night. There is no fixed time.
- 16) Bedtime is 8:30 at night. Lights must be shut off and the kids in bed. At 15 years of age, I can't get to sleep this early yet forced into a room. It is very depressing and degrading being treated like some little kid.
- 17) On one occasion I felt really sick and had a bad chest infection. I asked if one of the workers could take me to the walk-in-clinic that evening. I was told no and to get over it. When I asked staff to make a doctor's appointment they said no as well. Staff simply could not be bothered to take the time. I suffered for several days before my mother ended up taking me to the emergency at the hospital in Newberry to see a doctor when I had my next visit scheduled.
- 18) One of the workers was driving and texting at the same time while driving at night with kids from the group home in the van. The kids in care are treated like criminals and are not even allowed to have cell phone, yet the group home staff are the ones going around breaking the law in front of the kids. What kind of example are staff members setting?
- 19) At one time, my CAS driver, Jim used to take me on some outings such as fishing and I really respected him for going out of his way to do this. However, my CAS worker at the time, Lisa Vilaranda was upset with me and said that I could no longer do things with Jim. Typical of what I have experienced in CAS care, the CAS workers stop good thing just because you don't follow their rules.

Hatts Off Specialty Services – Hamilton (Previous placement to Craigwood)

- 20) There was one worker by the name of Beth who drove me and other kids in her car and the latch on the passenger side was broken and the passenger door would not remain shut. To keep the door closed, Beth had tied a sweater around the inside of the door handle. Every time that I or other children sat in the front seat of her car we had to hold the sweater tight to keep the passenger door from swinging opening as Beth drove her car. Both back doors were broken and could not be opened which is why I had to sit in the front seat. I told my

mother about this who then reported it to CAS. As a result of this report, I got in trouble with Beth. The rule is that kids get punished for reporting on staff who break the law.

- 21) While in care by grandfather died and I had asked for grief counselling. My request was denied by staff.
- 22) One time I was stabbed very hard with a fork by another violent kid which caused me to bleed a lot. I asked staff to take me to see the doctor cause I thought that I might need stitches but I was refused. After this injury, my next visit with my mother was cancelled for no reason. I was not allowed to have another visit with my mother until the wound had almost healed. Even today I have the scar of this injury. I believe that the workers did not want the doctor to document this injury and did not want my mother to see the injury before it was healed so that there would be no evidence of the attack. This is just another example of how staff cover up abuses going on inside of these facilities.
- 23) At the Hatts Off facility, I was frequently sick. I came down with eye infections and colds all the time. I believe it was because of the unsanitary conditions in the facility. Bed bugs were a problem and many times I would have bites all over my legs and arms. The workers knew there was a problem. More than once we had to leave our rooms while they sprayed for the bed bugs.
- 24) My PS2 player was stolen by one of the other residents. Staff just said too bad. After that I had to sleep with my Ipod in my underpants out of fear that my Ipod would be stolen next. I just did not feel safe nor that my possessions were safe. There was a constant fear of what someone might steal.
- 25) Staff provided the kids in care with cigarettes. It was one of the rewards that kids got if they did what staff told them to do. In most cases, staff acted not much differently than bullies who knew they could break the law themselves and get away with it.
- 26) I was physically restrained after I was 14 years of age by workers who just like to abuse their power and authority.

The Trust House - Chatham, Ontario (Previous placement to Craigwood)

- 27) On my 3rd night at the Trust House in Chatham one of the older boys who was much bigger than me assaulted me and I had to be taken to the hospital. Even after this boy assaulted me I was forced to share a room with this same boy for another five weeks. I was sometimes afraid to go to sleep at night in the same room when I could see that this boy was in one of his moods. Sometimes I would ask staff to let me sleep on the couch but my request was always denied.
- 28) I asked several times to change rooms but this was denied. It was not until the other boy was removed to a drug treatment facility did I feel safe again from that boy.
- 29) On another occasion, I played a prank on staff and locked one of the staff members out of the building around midnight. While I admit that my actions were not the best choice at the time, I did open the door and let the staff member back in. When the staff member came in he grabbed me by the throat and threw me up against the wall and said "I told you that you don't want to fuck with me." That staff member is a police officer that moonlights at the Trust house in Chatham.

Based on the events and care provided to me while in care pf the CAS, some of the things I have come to realize are:

- That my decision to go into care of the CAS was made out of anger at the time against my aunt and without me fully understanding the consequences of my actions. I did not want to follow the rules back and going with the CAS seemed at the time to be the easy way out.
- That I am not a perfect teenager and that do have issues being told what to do but I am willing to work with my aunt and other members of my family to deal with these issues.
- That I don't trust CAS and don't like how they have abused me.
- That taking drugs as CAS has forced me to do in the past has adversely affected my health and is not the answer. I now feel much better now that I have forced the issue and taken myself off of the meds that CAS forced upon me.
- That being held in care in an abusive CAS facility against my wishes has only made me more frustrated and angry and if anything has only made matters worse for me.
- That nothing is perfect but being in the care of my family is a far better solution than being in the care of the CAS.

My plan from this point forward

I have decided to stay with my Aunt, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who lives in Chatham. My aunt [REDACTED] is more than willing to provide good care for me in her home. She has on many occasions recently indicated her willingness to have me back in her home but CAS has turned her away. I believe that I am more mature now and can manage to work together with my Aunt. My Aunt is willing to work with the CAS within reasonable limits. My mother and my extended family are supportive of me moving back to live with my aunt Xxx. My family want me out of the terrible environment at the CAS group home and I want out of there too. While I cannot speak for all children who have been in care, certainly based on what I have seen and experienced at various CAS facilities I have been placed in, being in care of the CAS is simply a bad option for most kids to grow up in. Most staff at these places simply don't care about the children who are in care and abuse of power and control is an everyday occurrence.

At this point, I am asking that you assist me to change schools as quickly as possible so that I can finish off my school year at Victoria Park School. Although this school is connected to the CAS it is in a more like a real school in the community than the current school I attend which is in a converted garage on the group home property. I feel that Victoria Park school would be best for the remainder of this year because it is close to my aunt's home and I have attended school there before. I would like you to take whatever steps are necessary to assist me to get registered as quickly as possible so that I do not miss much school. I would also ask that my health card be given immediately back to me or my aunt in case I may need it.

I would appreciate the help of the CAS in my return into the care of my family with the least possible disruption. I oppose becoming a Crown Ward and wish the CAS to withdraw the court action trying to make me a Crown Ward. I will be calling my children's lawyer and copying this letter to her as well. Should the CAS not stop trying to make me a Crown Ward then I will speak for myself in the court and submit my own sworn affidavit to let the judge know of the many abuses I have suffered as a result of the CAS. I am simply fed up with being abused in care and having my rights violated by workers who falsely claim to be helping me and the other children in CAS care. Overall, I believe that being in the physical care of the CAS had done far more harm than good.

If you have any questions you may contact my Aunt at (████) █████.

Yours truly

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cc: Ms. Judith Pascoe, Children's Lawyer
Ontario Child Advocate Office