



CWICE

Child Welfare Immigration
Centre of Excellence

Subject: Written Submission Advocating for Bill S-235: A Comprehensive Perspective from the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE)

Background: The Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE) at Peel Children’s Aid Society is a pioneering entity in Ontario, established with funding and mandate from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario. Our mission is to provide crucial consultation and assistance to child welfare professionals across the province of Ontario, focusing on the intricate interplay between child protection and immigration. As a leader in this domain, CWICE actively collaborates with partners at various governmental levels to foster effective partnerships and establish protocols addressing immigration-related challenges. Our teams offer dedicated support to children, youth, and families entangled in the child welfare system, especially those grappling with unresolved immigration or settlement issues. CWICE is instrumental in bridging the gap between child welfare and immigration systems, delivering indispensable support and addressing clinical, developmental, and mental health needs of those in our care.

Key Points:

1. Imperative of Citizenship for Foster Children:

Citizenship transcends legal status, symbolizing acceptance and belonging. The current legislative framework poses significant barriers, especially for individuals with mental health or developmental issues. As wards of the state, these youths should be recognized as Canada’s children and provided every opportunity for full integration into society.

2. Consequences of Legislative Shortcomings:

Our experience highlights the severe consequences of delayed or denied citizenship. These include deportation, mental health deterioration, addiction issues, and familial distress, underscoring the urgency for legislative reform.

3. Legislative Ambiguities and Challenges:

While the 2017 amendment to the Citizenship Act, which enables child welfare agencies to apply for citizenship on behalf of children in their care, was a commendable advancement, it has proven to be insufficient in practical terms. The extensive documentation required is



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frequently inaccessible for numerous children in care. Consequently, these children often leave the system lacking proper identification or citizenship, which significantly hinders their integration into society. This issue is further exacerbated in provinces and territories lacking specialized services like those offered by CWICE, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and accessible solutions.

4. **Bill S-235: A Pathway to Citizenship:**

Bill S-235 proposes citizenship for children in government care akin to acquisition through parental lineage, facilitated by the provincial or territorial child welfare agency with legal guardianship. This bill represents a critical step towards resolving the citizenship dilemma for these vulnerable children and youth.

5. **Understanding Generational and Systemic Impact:**

Insights from Indigenous communities and our client experiences highlight the profound long-term and generational effects of policies within the child welfare and immigration sectors. These impacts underscore the necessity for sensitive and inclusive legislative measures.

6. **Addressing Financial and Procedural Obstacles:**

The high costs and complexity of citizenship applications pose significant barriers, especially for youth transitioning from foster care to independence. Simplifying these processes is essential for their successful integration into society.

Recommendations:

1. **Endorse Bill S-235:**

Advocate for the bill's consistent, empathetic management of citizenship cases for children and youth in foster care, preventing statelessness, deportation, and related traumas.

2. **Acknowledge and Address Unique Challenges:**

Recognize and address specific barriers faced by this demographic, particularly those with clinical, developmental, or mental health challenges.



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3. Ease Financial and Procedural Barriers:

Simplify the citizenship application process, making it financially accessible and less complex, especially for young adults exiting foster care.

4. Develop a National Strategy:

Collaborate in formulating a nationwide plan, potentially with CWICE's input, to implement Bill S-235's provisions uniformly and inclusively across all provinces.

Conclusion:

CWICE advocates for legislative reforms that fully comprehend and address the challenges faced by children and youth in foster care, particularly those intertwined with immigration issues. Bill S-235 presents a significant opportunity to enhance these individuals' lives, offering them the security and sense of belonging essential for their well-being and successful integration into Canadian society.

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