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Executive leadership needed to address privacy breaches, Acting Commissioner concludes

VICTORIA—The B.C. government must act quickly to appoint a Chief Privacy Officer, Acting Information and Privacy Commissioner, Paul D.K. Fraser, Q.C., today recommended. The recommendation was contained in his investigation report, released today, on the large-scale privacy breach by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) that affected over 1,400 clients of the MCFD and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD). Commissioner Fraser found MCFD and MHSD failed to make reasonable security arrangements to protect personal information from risks such as unauthorized access, collection, use, disclosure or disposal as required by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

On April 8, 2009, the RCMP informed the government that it had recovered documents containing sensitive personal information while searching the home of an MCFD employee. Despite this, no action was taken to deal with the matter until October 20, 2009.

In the report, Commissioner Fraser found a troubling lack of knowledge within the Ministries about the rules respecting the protection of personal information. He concluded that, at the present time, “It is difficult for public servants to find policies dealing specifically with a privacy breach”.

In response to this and other recent privacy breaches, Commissioner Fraser has recommended that government create an executive-level Chief Privacy Officer. “I believe that to do so would represent a visible and substantial commitment to meeting the public’s legitimate expectations that personal information in the hands of government will be properly protected”, the Commissioner stated. “It would also provide leadership to ensure that privacy breaches are quickly and effectively dealt with.”

The report is posted on the OIPC website at:

http://www.oipc.bc.ca/orders/investigation_reports/InvestigationReportF10-01.pdf

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