



# **17-YEAR-OLD SABRINA**

## **AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW**

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta  
**March 2026**

# LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under my authority and duty as identified in Section 9.1 of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act (CYAA)*, the following is an individual investigative review regarding Sabrina. Her circumstances meet the criteria for a **mandatory review**. Sabrina was receiving Child Intervention through a Temporary Guardianship Order at the time of her passing.

Investigative reviews are designed to improve the lives of young people by identifying ways to enhance services and supports, leading to system improvements and better outcomes for young people and their families.

The investigation process includes:

- Examination of critical issues
- Review of documentation and reports
- Review of policy and casework practice
- Personal interviews
- Other factors that may arise for consideration
- Notification and involvement of the young person's family, Band, Delegated First Nation Agency, community or cultural group, relevant Ministry, law enforcement agency, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta Health Services, and any other person the Advocate considers appropriate.

In accordance with the *CYAA*, investigative reviews must be non-identifying. Therefore, the names used in these reports are pseudonyms (false names). Great care has been taken to protect their privacy; however, there is no guarantee that interested parties will be unable to identify them. Accordingly, readers and interested parties, including the media, should respect this privacy and not focus on identifying the individuals and locations involved in these matters.

Investigative reviews do not contain findings of legal responsibility or conclusions of law nor replace other processes that may occur, such as investigations or prosecutions under the *Criminal Code* of Canada. The intent of a review is not to find fault with specific individuals but to identify key issues and meaningful findings.

Sabrina's experiences were unique, and she left a lasting impression on those who knew and loved her. My heartfelt condolences go out to her family and those who cared about Sabrina.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

**Terri Pelton**

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

## ABOUT SABRINA AND HER FAMILY

Sabrina<sup>1</sup> was 17 years old when she was found unresponsive in the community. Emergency medical services (EMS) responded, and she was transported to the hospital, where she passed away. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner continues to investigate her death. Sabrina was receiving Child Intervention through a **Temporary Guardianship Order (TGO)**<sup>2</sup> at the time of her passing.

Sabrina was an outgoing, young First Nation woman with a great sense of humour. She enjoyed cooking, listening to music, and participating in cultural ceremonies. She was the oldest of Jane and Carl's three children. At times, their relationship was violent, and they separated when Sabrina was eight years old. The children lived with their mother in their First Nation.

## SUMMARY OF SABRINA'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

### Sabrina from Birth to 10 Years Old

Sabrina was born healthy. By nine months old, she had been taken to the hospital five times for minor illnesses. Each time, she was assessed, treated, and discharged to her parents' care.

When Sabrina was ten months old, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury related to family violence. Carl was charged with assault, and a No-Contact Order (NCO) was obtained. Jane entered into an **Enhancement Agreement (EA)** and received therapeutic services and parenting resources. Carl was given information about community-based anger management and counselling supports. Involvement ended at the conclusion of the EA.

Over the next two years, Sabrina was taken to the hospital several times for minor illnesses, and twice because it was suspected that she had accidentally ingested medication. Each time, she was treated and discharged to her parents' care.

When Sabrina was four years old, Child Intervention received three reports about emotional injury related to Carl's substance use, family violence, and Jane's self-harming behaviours. Carl was charged with physical assault, and an NCO was obtained. Each involvement ended because Jane and Carl separated, or she denied her mental health challenges and accessed community-based resources for herself and her children.

In Kindergarten, teachers noted concerns with Sabrina's development. She was assessed and diagnosed with a fine motor delay and an expressive and receptive language delay. She worked with an educational assistant and had occupational and speech and language therapy; her movements and speech improved.

Between Grades 1 and 2, Sabrina had three school moves; the reason is unknown. Teachers noticed that she was easily distracted and had concerns about her ability to follow instructions and routines. She had a psycho-educational assessment that found she had an intellectual disability and severe expressive and receptive language delays. Sabrina had Individualized Program Plans (IPP) that provided extra time to complete tasks and one-to-one instruction.

When Sabrina was eight years old, Child Intervention received a report about emotional injury related to family violence and Carl's substance use. Involvement ended after Jane and Carl went to couples counselling. Shortly after, they separated, and Sabrina and her siblings lived with their mother and had regular visits with their father.

Over the next two years, Child Intervention received five reports about neglect and failure to protect from sexual abuse. Concerns were related to family violence, and reports that Jane's partner had assaulted Sabrina. The police investigated, and charges were not laid. Additional reports were received related to Carl's substance use when he visited with his children at Jane's home. The police investigated, and Carl was arrested. Jane applied to change the Parenting Order to limit his access to their children. She received information on community-based resources, and involvement ended. It is unknown if she accessed these services.

In elementary school, Sabrina was involved in a literacy program. By Grade 4, her reading had improved, but she continued to struggle with comprehension. Her teachers noted she enjoyed the program and being with her classmates.

### Sabrina from 11 to 17 Years Old

Over the following two years, Sabrina changed schools twice; the reason is unknown. When she was in Grade 7, the COVID-19 public health measures were put in place, and education transitioned to online learning. Twelve-year-old Sabrina's attendance became sporadic. She struggled to submit her assignments, and her limited engagement made it difficult to assess her academically. It is unknown if she received support to address barriers to her school engagement. During this time, Sabrina started drinking alcohol.

When Sabrina was 13 years old, Child Intervention received two reports about physical and emotional injury related to family violence. Involvements ended after Jane said that

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.  
2. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

she would access community-based services. At 14 years old, Sabrina's substance use escalated to include methamphetamine, and community-based support workers helped her mother confine her under the *Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act (PChAD)*. Upon discharge, Sabrina was given information about addiction and mental health supports, but she refused.

One month later, Child Intervention received a report about similar concerns. During this time, Sabrina disclosed that she had been assaulted. Criminal charges were laid, and an NCO was obtained. Sabrina tried to access supports, but there were waitlists, so Jane involved her in Indigenous ceremony to address her trauma. Sabrina's substance use escalated, and she was confined under *PChAD*. While there, she had physical outbursts and was charged with mischief. Shortly after her release, she was taken to the hospital under the *Mental Health Act (MHA)* because of self-harm, but denied the concerns; she was treated and discharged.

Sabrina was charged for physically assaulting another student at school. Jane entered into a **Custody Agreement (CA)** indicating that she was unable to manage her daughter's behaviours. Sabrina was placed in group care. Within days, she was asked to leave after she had physical outbursts toward staff. It was agreed that Sabrina would temporarily stay with her aunt, Sue. After moving, she went to a new school in Grade 9, but her attendance was poor.

Over the next several months, Sabrina was taken to the hospital four times for physical and mental health-related concerns. Twice, she was assessed under the *MHA* and said that she had auditory hallucinations and increasing suicidal thoughts. She refused medication and community-based counselling. Sabrina was diagnosed with substance use disorder and parent-child relational problems. Each time, she was treated and discharged to Sue's care.

Sabrina often left her aunt's home without permission, and her substance use escalated to include heroin. She shared that Sue used substances, and she did not want to stay there. Sabrina was moved to a group home and had overnight visits with her mother. Her placement ended after two weeks when she did not return from Jane's home. Sabrina's behaviours remained unchanged, and Jane developed a safety plan with her daughter that included carrying a Narcan kit. Jane also supported Sabrina to attend court for her charges.

One month before Sabrina's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, she was taken to the hospital for an overdose. She was treated and discharged. She was confined under *PChAD*, began counselling, and said that she wanted to stop using substances. Jane told caseworkers that Sabrina was doing well and declined further support. Intervention involvement ended at the conclusion of the CA.

In Grade 10, Sabrina transitioned to an outreach school and continued to receive educational accommodations; however, she did not attend regularly. Over the next year, Sabrina was taken to the hospital multiple times because of her escalating substance use and declining mental health. She was diagnosed with substance-induced psychosis, an intellectual disability, cannabis use disorder, and a stress-related disorder. During this period, she was confined four times under *PChAD* and hospitalized twice under the *MHA*, including a 28-day admission. While there, she refused medication and therapy and had physical and emotional outbursts that resulted in criminal charges. Discharge recommendations included community-based addiction and mental health services, psychiatry, and addiction counselling, which she did not access.

Jane applied for Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), and several months later, her application was approved. She was placed on a waitlist for an FSCD caseworker; one had not been assigned prior to Sabrina's passing.

When Sabrina was 17 years old, Child Intervention received a report about neglect; concerns were related to her substance use and high-risk activities. Sabrina was confined under *PChAD*, and when she was discharged, Jane entered into a CA. Sabrina was placed in group care, and had additional staffing supports to manage her outbursts. During brief periods of stability, she took part in life skills, addiction, and mental health programming.

Over the following three months, Sabrina was taken to the hospital multiple times for substance-induced psychosis and physical outbursts; she was confined twice in **secure services** facilities. After her discharge, she met with a psychiatrist regularly but had challenges taking her medication because she often left her placement without permission.

Jane's engagement with the case team lessened, and at 17 years old, Sabrina was **apprehended** and became the subject of a TGO. She continued to be involved in high-risk activities and was charged for physical assault with a weapon and incarcerated. While at the young offender centre, she met with an addiction counsellor and received information about community-based services. She was released to group home staff and had conditions that included a curfew and reporting to a probation officer. Caseworkers and probation officers discussed Sabrina's level of functioning and substance use to inform planning. She had difficulty following the conditions and was incarcerated twice.

Sabrina's circumstances remained unstable. She was asked to leave her placement because of behavioural outbursts towards staff, and she went to live with Sue. She began Grade 12 at a new school but did not attend regularly. Soon after, Sabrina left home without permission and was later found unconscious in the community. EMS responded, and she was transported to the hospital, where she passed away. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and the police continue to investigate her death. A wake was held in her First Nation to honour her life. Sabrina is deeply missed by those who knew and loved her.

# TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Birth to 10 Years Old	11 to 17 Years Old	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Birth – 3 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Several hospital visits for minor illnesses</li> <li>· Child Intervention involvement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Enhancement Agreement</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>4 – 5 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Child Intervention involved 3 times</li> <li>· Assessed               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diagnosed with fine motor delay, expressive and receptive language delay</li> <li>· Speech, language, and occupational therapy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>6 – 7 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 3 school moves</li> <li>· Assessed               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Intellectual disability and severe expressive and receptive language delays</li> <li>· Individualized Program Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>8 – 10 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Child Intervention involved 6 times</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>11 – 12 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· School attendance declined</li> <li>· Alcohol use began</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>13 - 14 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Child Intervention involved 2 times</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>14 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Substance use escalated</li> <li>· Assaulted</li> <li>· Confined under <i>Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Act (PChAD)</i> 2 times</li> <li>· Criminal charges for physical assault and mischief</li> <li>· Child Intervention involvement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Custody Agreement</li> <li>· Group care</li> <li>· Stayed with aunt</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Confined under the <i>Mental Health Act (MHA)</i> 2 times               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diagnosed with substance use disorder, parents-child relational problem</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Group care</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>15 – 16 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Confined multiple times under <i>PChAD</i> and <i>MHA</i></li> <li>· Multiple hospital visits               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diagnosed with substance-induced psychosis, intellectual disability, cannabis use disorder, and stress-related disorder</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Application for Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Waitlist for FSCD caseworker</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>17 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Confined under <i>PChAD</i></li> <li>· Child Intervention involvement               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Custody Agreement</li> <li>· Group care</li> <li>· Temporary Guardianship Order</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Confined in secure services facility 2 times</li> <li>· Criminal charges</li> <li>· Incarcerated 3 times</li> <li>· Stayed with aunt</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>17-year-old Sabrina passed away</b></li> </ul>

# FINDINGS

## Children and Family Services

Child Intervention was involved with Sabrina and her family 10 times in her first 12 years. Concerns were related to neglect and emotional injury. Her mother agreed to apply for orders to protect her children, connect to community-based supports, and once, entered into an Enhancement Agreement. Despite repeated and escalating concerns, interventions remained relatively unchanged. Sabrina required a comprehensive assessment of her parents' capacity to provide care, the effectiveness of community-based services, and consideration of the impact of ongoing concerns on her overall well-being.

Over the next two years, Child Intervention received three reports about physical and emotional injury related to family violence, Sabrina's escalating substance use, and declining mental health. The first two involvements ended after caseworkers engaged Jane in planning and she accessed community-based services. During the third involvement, she entered into a Custody Agreement (CA), and Sabrina was placed in group care. Attempts were made to connect her to community-based addiction and mental health supports, but she refused. Sabrina often left her placements without permission, and she was supported to live with her mother. Caseworkers collaborated with Jane and helped her arrange community-based services for Sabrina before involvement ended.

When Sabrina was 17 years old, Child Intervention received a report about similar concerns. Jane entered into a CA but had challenges following through with planning, and Sabrina became the subject of a Temporary Guardianship Order. Her high-risk behaviours continued, and although Sabrina received appropriate services to address her acute risk, she would have benefited from concurrent planning that considered her history of trauma and its impact on her behaviours.

## Health and Mental Health and Addiction

In her first 11 years, Sabrina was taken to the hospital several times for minor illnesses and received timely health care.

At 12 years old, Sabrina began to use substances, which escalated and impacted her mental health. She was often confined under various legislations and received several diagnoses. Recommendations included community-based mental health and addiction supports, which she frequently declined. Sabrina would have benefited from a thorough assessment of the barriers to her accessing supports, as well as a warm handoff to service providers.

## Education

As concerns arose about her development in elementary school, Sabrina received timely assessments and several diagnoses. Recommendations informed supports, and she had ongoing Individualized Program Plans that provided accommodations.

When Sabrina was in junior high school, classes moved to online learning; her attendance declined, and she struggled to complete her work. It is unknown if she received support to address barriers to her engagement. By high school, her circumstances were unstable, and her substance use and mental health concerns significantly impacted her engagement, making service delivery challenging.

## Justice

Sabrina was 14 years old when she became involved with the justice system. As she accumulated more charges, she was incarcerated and while there, supported to access addiction and mental health services. Upon her release, she disengaged from these supports. Sabrina reported to probation officers who were aware of her level of functioning and unaddressed substance use. Although these considerations were reflected in planning, she had difficulty following the release conditions.

## Assisted Living and Social Services

When Sabrina was 17 years old, her mother applied for Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) and was put on a waitlist for an FSCD caseworker, who was not in place prior to her passing. Sabrina and her family required timely FSCD services.

# THEMES TO TRACK

## 1. Assessment

In her first 12 years, Sabrina would have benefited from a comprehensive assessment of her parents' capacity to provide care, the effectiveness of community-based services, and consideration of the impact of ongoing concerns on her overall well-being.

## 2. Case planning

At 17 years old, Sabrina required concurrent planning that considered her history of trauma and its impact on her behaviours.

In elementary school, education planning was informed by Sabrina's level of functioning and adapted to her evolving needs.

## 3. Mental health and addiction services

At 17 years old, Sabrina required a thorough assessment of the barriers to her accessing mental health and addiction supports, as well as a warm handoff to service providers.

## 4. Services and supports for young people with complex needs

Sabrina and her family required timely FSCD services.

## 5. Toxic drug supply

Sabrina was 12 years old when she started using substances, and her use escalated to include more potent substances. The Advocate remains deeply concerned about the number of young people impacted by substance use.

# APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

## **Apprehended**

The court grants the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (CYFEA)* temporary custody of the child on reasonable and probable grounds that the child needs intervention in accordance with *CYFEA*.

## **Custody Agreement (CA)**

A voluntary agreement between guardians and the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. Decision-making is shared and the young person is placed outside the home.

## **Enhancement Agreement (EA)**

A voluntary agreement under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* to provide services and support to a family or a young person who is 16 or 17 years old. It is intended to address protection concerns while the child remains with a guardian or lives independently.

## **Mandatory Review**

Under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate must conduct a mandatory review when a young person dies who had an agreement or order under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* at the time of or within two years of their death. A public report must be released within one year of being notified of the young person’s death.

## **Secure Services**

The *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* allows for the confinement of a child for up to 30 days for stabilization and assessment when the child is found to be an immediate danger to themselves or others.

## **Temporary Guardianship Order (TGO)**

The court grants the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* custody and guardianship of a child for a specific period. The child is in the care of Child Intervention Services, and guardianship is shared with the parent/ legal guardian.

# 17-YEAR-OLD SABRINA · AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW



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