

# **15-YEAR-OLD BRITTANY**

**Serious Injury**

**AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW**

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, Alberta

**July 2026**

# LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Under my authority and duty as identified in Section 9(2)(d) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act (CYAA)*, the following is an individual investigative review regarding Brittany. Her circumstances meet the criteria for a **systemic review**. Brittany was receiving Child Intervention through a Permanent Guardianship Order at the time of her serious injury.

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.

Brittany's experiences were unique, and her injury has left a lasting impact on her life and her family's. My thoughts are with Brittany, her family, and those who care about her.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Terri Pelton]

**Terri Pelton**

Child and Youth Advocate (Alberta)

## ABOUT BRITTANY AND HER FAMILY

Brittany<sup>1</sup> was 15 years old when she was seriously injured due to alcohol poisoning. Brittany was receiving Child Intervention through a **Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO)** at the time of her injury.

Brittany is an articulate and resilient young woman who enjoys having deep conversations. She likes fashion and video games. She is part of a blended family and moved to Alberta from another province. Her parents, Allison and Callum, separated when she was young, and she had no further contact with her father.

## SUMMARY OF BRITTANY'S EXPERIENCES WITH GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

### Brittany from Birth to 11 Years Old

Brittany was born in another province, and little is known about her circumstances. After her parents separated, Allison entered a new relationship with Jim, and they had three children. They separated before Brittany was five years old, and Allison and her children moved to Alberta and lived with her parents.

Brittany received routine health care. When she was in Grade 1, teachers noted she had difficulty with peer interactions. Brittany was assessed, and results indicated that she had challenges with her reading and writing. An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) was implemented that included speech therapy and classroom accommodations that continued throughout elementary school. IPPs also supported her participation in school activities to address her peer conflicts.

### Brittany from 12 to 15 Years Old

Brittany's IPP continued into junior high school. In Grade 7, her attendance declined and attempts to engage her and her family in her education were unsuccessful.

Shortly before her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, the police received a report that Brittany had been assaulted by a relative, Greg. She did not confirm the allegations, and charges were not laid. A safety plan was developed with Allison, who said that she would not allow Greg to have contact with her children.

The following year, Child Intervention received a report about failure to protect from sexual abuse. Concerns were related to Greg assaulting Brittany, which Allison disputed. The

police investigated, and Greg was charged; a No-Contact Order (NCO) was obtained. A safety plan was developed, and relatives agreed to care for the children; however, they said that they did not have the capacity to meet Brittany's needs. Allison entered into a **Custody Agreement (CA)** related to Brittany and an **Enhancement Agreement (EA)** regarding her other children, Dedra, Elenore, and Fran. Brittany was placed in foster care while her siblings remained with relatives.

Allison completed a program to better understand the impact of sexual abuse. It was determined that Dedra, Elenore, and Fran could return home, and their intervention involvement ended while Brittany remained in foster care.

Brittany's contact with her family lessened, and her school attendance remained poor. She voiced that she was afraid to leave her foster home. Caseworkers, caregivers, and teachers tried to encourage her attendance, but she refused. She worked with a therapist to address her feelings of abandonment and anxiety.

Allison told caseworkers that she did not think she had the capacity to care for Brittany. A support worker helped her access community-based services, but Allison said that she did not find the service useful, and her involvement lessened. Brittany was supported by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate to increase contact with her family. Allison was reluctant, and efforts to reconnect Callum with Brittany were unsuccessful.

Brittany continued to work with her therapist and received ongoing medical and mental health services from a specialized pediatric clinic. She was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, and was prescribed medication, which she refused. Doctors and caseworkers met regularly to talk about Brittany's medical and mental health needs and encouraged her to take her medication.

Brittany said that she was sad about not seeing her family. She began to self-harm, refused to safety plan, nor attend school. Her foster parents found it challenging to meet her emotional needs. At 14 years old, Brittany was moved to an intensive residential program for children who had been abused, and her mental health improved. After her discharge, she was placed in another foster home as her previous caregivers said that they did not have the capacity to manage her needs.

Brittany's mental health declined, and she voiced that she was afraid to be away from her foster home. She had verbal outbursts, did not follow the rules, and refused to go to school. Attempts by caseworkers, therapists, and her caregivers to encourage her attendance were unsuccessful.

Allison's engagement with supports remained poor and Brittany was **apprehended**. Brittany said that she missed her family and continued to self-harm. She refused to safety

1. All names in the report are pseudonyms.

2. Bolded terms are defined in Appendix A.

plan and was moved back to the residential program to stabilize. After her discharge, she was placed in campus-based group care because her foster parents said that they did not have the capacity to meet her escalating needs. She attended the onsite school, and her IPP continued. Instructional strategies were adapted and she received additional time to complete schoolwork. She was provided a tutor, but her participation was poor.

Months before her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, Brittany became the subject of a PGO. Caseworkers and placement staff provided her opportunities to explore activities to enhance her well-being, and she went to therapeutic programming and worked with her therapist.

Brittany had nightmares and told group home staff that she missed her family. She often left her placement without permission and had physical outbursts. Once, she was taken to the hospital and assessed following an outburst; she was discharged with recommendations to follow up with her therapist and pediatrician.

Caseworkers and group home staff helped Brittany develop strategies to manage her emotions. She met with her pediatrician and caseworkers and agreed to a safety plan to maintain contact with staff when she left the program without permission.

At 15 years old, Brittany was seriously injured from alcohol poisoning. She was taken to the hospital and admitted to the intensive care unit. Brittany stabilized and was discharged to caseworkers. She continues to receive Child Intervention through a PGO.

# TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

| Birth to 11 Years Old                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 12 to 15 Years Old                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Birth – 4 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Born in another province</li> <li>· Parents separated</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>5 – 11 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Moved to Alberta</li> <li>· Assessed in elementary school                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Individualized Program Plan (IPP)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>12 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· IPP in junior high school</li> <li>· School attendance declined</li> <li>· Police investigation for assault                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Charges not laid</li> <li>· Safety plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>13 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Child Intervention involvement                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Police investigation                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Charges laid</li> <li>· No Contact Order</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Custody Agreements                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Moved to foster care</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Self-harm                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Therapeutic support</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>· Specialized pediatrician                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression</li> <li>· Prescribed medication</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>14 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Attended specialized programming</li> <li>· Apprehended                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Foster care</li> <li>· Campus-based group care</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Permanent Guardianship Order</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>15 Years Old</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Behaviours escalated</li> <li>· Left placement without permission</li> <li>· Physical and emotional outbursts                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Hospital visit for physical outburst</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>15-year-old Brittany was seriously injured</b></p> |

# FINDINGS

## Children and Family Services

Child Intervention first became involved with Brittany and her family when she was 13 years old. Concerns were related to her being abused by a relative. Her mother's engagement with services was poor and Brittany became the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order at 15 years old. Therapeutic supports and intensive treatment programs were promptly arranged for Brittany to address trauma, grief and loss, and as her needs evolved, services were adapted.

## Health and Mental Health and Addiction

Brittany received routine health care after her family moved to Alberta. When she was in foster care, she received timely pharmaceutical and therapeutic supports as her mental health needs emerged. Information was routinely shared with other professionals to inform and coordinate services.

## Education

In elementary school, when concerns were noted for her development, Brittany had timely assessments that identified challenges with reading and writing. She had Individualized Program Plans (IPP) that were adapted to meet her evolving needs and continued throughout her schooling. Over time, Brittany's attendance declined and attempts to engage her in her education were unsuccessful. Educators collaborated with her casework team to develop strategies for her to succeed in school.

## THEMES TO TRACK

### 1. Trauma, grief and loss

Brittany received timely supports to address her trauma, grief and loss that were adapted to her evolving needs.

### 2. Collaboration and information sharing

Professionals across the systems routinely shared information to inform and coordinate services.

# 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.

## **Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO)**

Under this order, the “Director” as defined in the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* becomes the sole guardian of a child. The order is sought when it is believed that the child cannot be safely returned to their guardian within a specified time frame.

## **Systemic Review**

Under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate may conduct a public review when a young person is seriously injured or dies while (or within two years of) receiving designated services (*Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* intakes, assessments, post-18 supports, was in open or closed custody under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, and/or involvement under the *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*) to determine if systemic issues are present.

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