

# A Look into Our Thoughts:

A Collaborative Initiative on the Creation of a  
Commissioner for Canada's Children and Youth



THE HONOURABLE | L'HONORABLE  
**Rosemary Moodie**  
SENATOR | SÉNATRICE  
CANADA

## Executive Summary

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (“CRC”) is an international agreement that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of every child.

Following its adoption and ratification of the CRC by 196 nations in 1996, over 70 countries, particularly in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America, have appointed a commissioner or an ombudsperson for children and youth at the national level, Canada not being one of them (Bendo, 2017; UNICEF Canada, 2010). Children make up nearly one-quarter of the Canadian population<sup>1</sup>, yet Canada has not established an independent national office to promote, monitor and investigate children's rights.

In recent years, there have been several attempts to establish an independent Children's Commissioner at the national level in Canada.

Over 25 years ago, Senator Landon Pearson put forth a recommendation to establish a federal Commissioner for Canada's children (Pearson, 1997).

Subsequently, in 2001, she and her parliamentary colleague Karen Kraft-Sloan produced the report titled *A Commissioner for Canada's Children* (Pearson & Sloan, 2001),



updated in 2016, describing the potential role of a Commissioner in Canada. Furthermore, in its 2007 report titled “The Silenced Citizens: Effective implementation of Canada's international obligations with respect to the rights of Children,” the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights recommended that Canada establish an independent Children's Commissioner at the national level (Senate of Canada, 2007). In June 2020, Senator Rosemary Moodie introduced Bill S-217 (which became Bill S-210), *An Act to establish the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada*. Bill S-210

proposes the establishment of an appointed Commissioner for Children and Youth to promote, monitor and report on the implementation of Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The legislation also proposes the creation of an Assistant Commissioner to ensure focus on matters related to First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth. As noted, one of the primary purposes of a Children's Commissioner would be to support and serve children.

Therefore, Senator Moodie's office recognized how crucial and



In June 2020, Senator Rosemary Moodie introduced Bill S-217 (which became Bill S-210), *An Act to establish the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada*.

important it was to hear directly from those who would be directly affected by the creation of such an office. Following the introduction of Bill S-210, in the fall of 2020, her office reached out to various organizations across the country with diverse youth networks to collaborate and engage with youth on the content and direction of Bill S-210. The goal was to engage with children and youth from across the country from different equity groups, as they considered it crucial and instructive to go directly to youth to give them an opportunity to speak and share their own voice.

35 engagement sessions were organized, led by youth facilitators, and included 402 young people from diverse networks. They were invit-

ed to participate and express their views and opinions.

Another 89 participated through an online survey, for a total of 491 young people. After the engagement sessions concluded, youth roundtables were formed that guided writers on the structure and content of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The child population estimate was obtained from the Government of Canada, Statistics Canada.



**CHILDREN AND YOUTH'S  
VISION FOR A FEDERAL  
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN**



QUESTION 1:

# Should there be a Commissioner for Children and Youth?

TOTAL SURVEYED: 402 PARTICIPANTS



YES



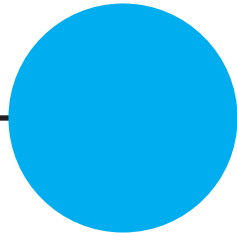
NO



DID NOT SPECIFY<sup>5</sup>



UNSURE



**83%**

Based on  
335 respondents



LESS THAN

**1%**

Based on  
5 respondents



**12%**

Based on  
51 respondents



LESS THAN

**1%**

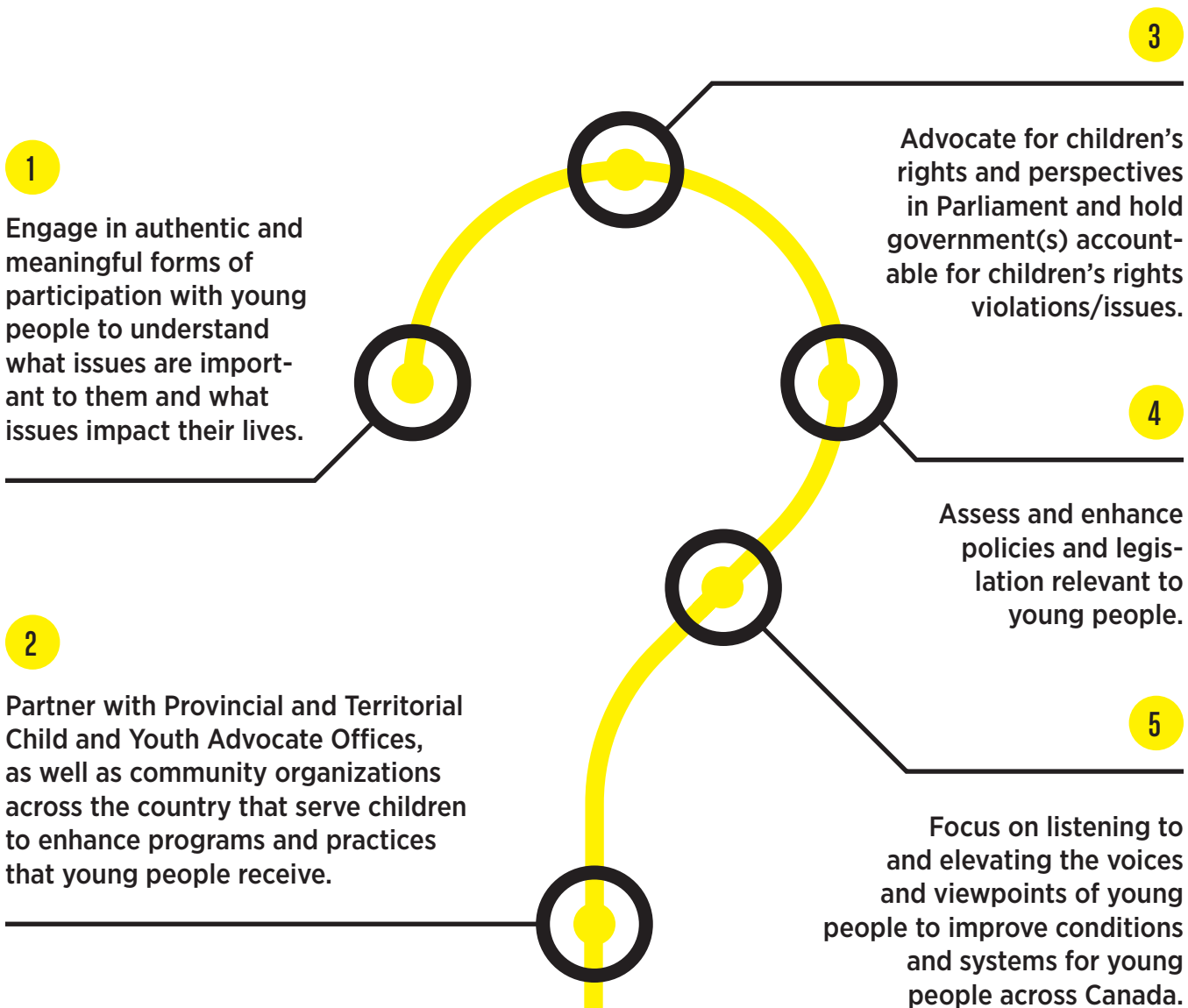
Based on  
11 respondents

**This finding highlights the importance of establishing/appointing a Children's Commissioner/Office in Canada, based on young people's perspectives.**

QUESTION 2:

# What should the purpose of the Commissioner be?

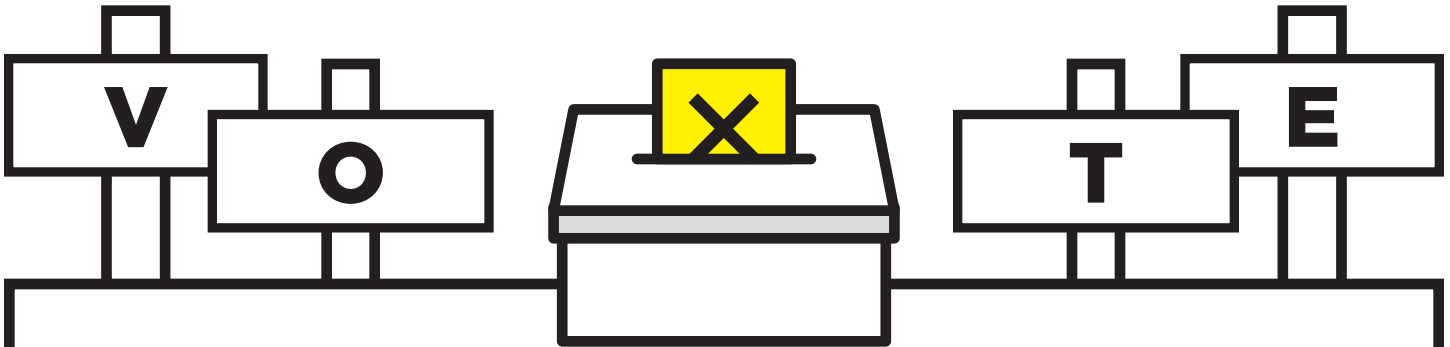
In our engagement sessions with young people, the participants identified five key purposes that they believed would be important for a Commissioner for Children and Youth to fulfill:



QUESTION 3:

# How and who should choose the Commissioner for Children and Youth?

Young people suggested that a Commissioner should be voted into the position rather than appointed through governmental processes.



The participants agreed that a range of individuals and groups across each province and territory should be involved in voting for a Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada, including:



### Community Organizations

that serve children and youth.



### Professionals

that work in child-service delivery systems, including education, law, healthcare, and social services.



### Parents and Civil Society Stakeholders



### Young people across Canada

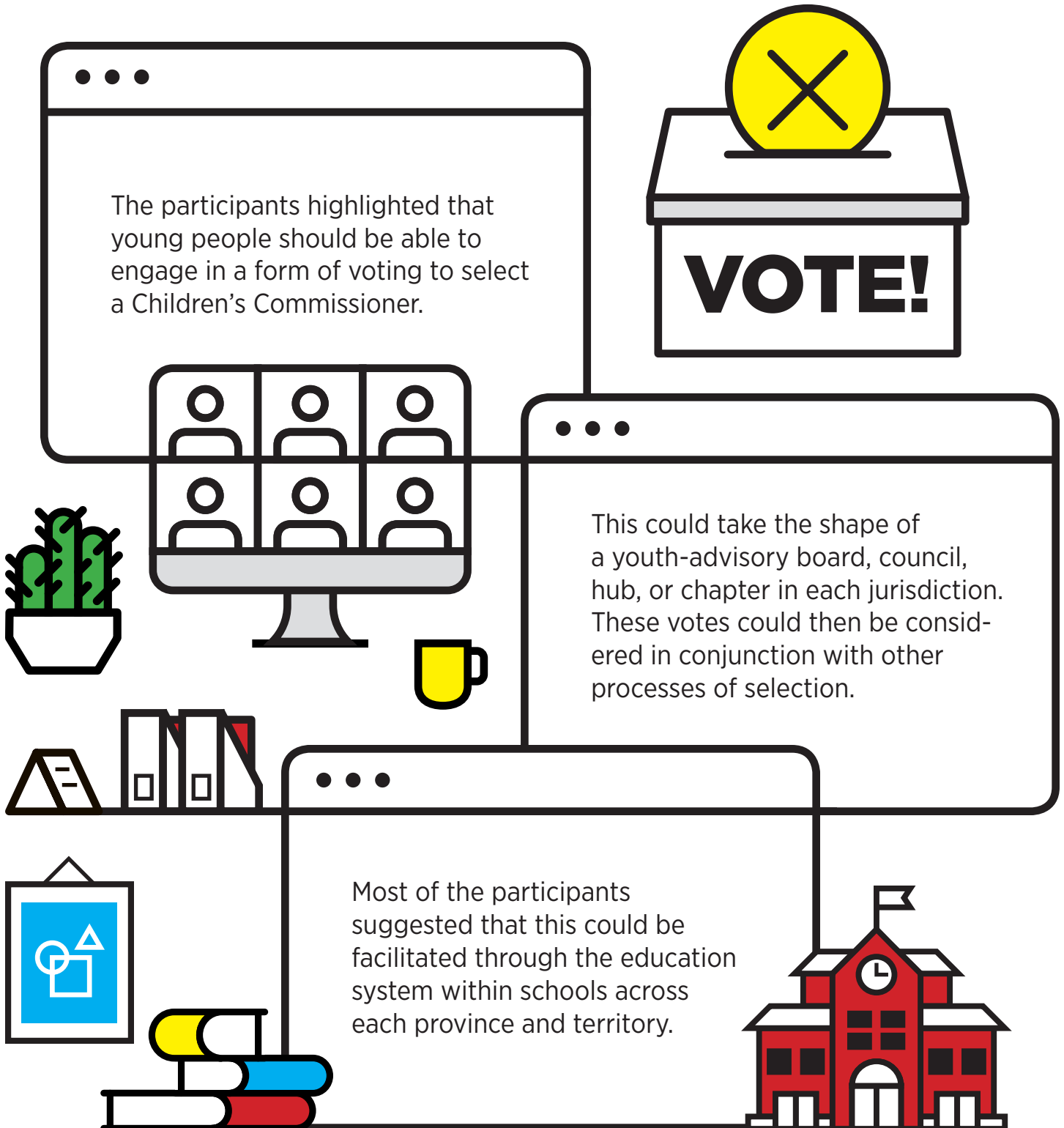
including children and youth who face challenging circumstances.

Some suggested that a selection committee, advisory group, or board from across Canada comprised of these various representatives (independent from government), could vote collectively to establish a Commissioner for Children and Youth.



QUESTION 4:

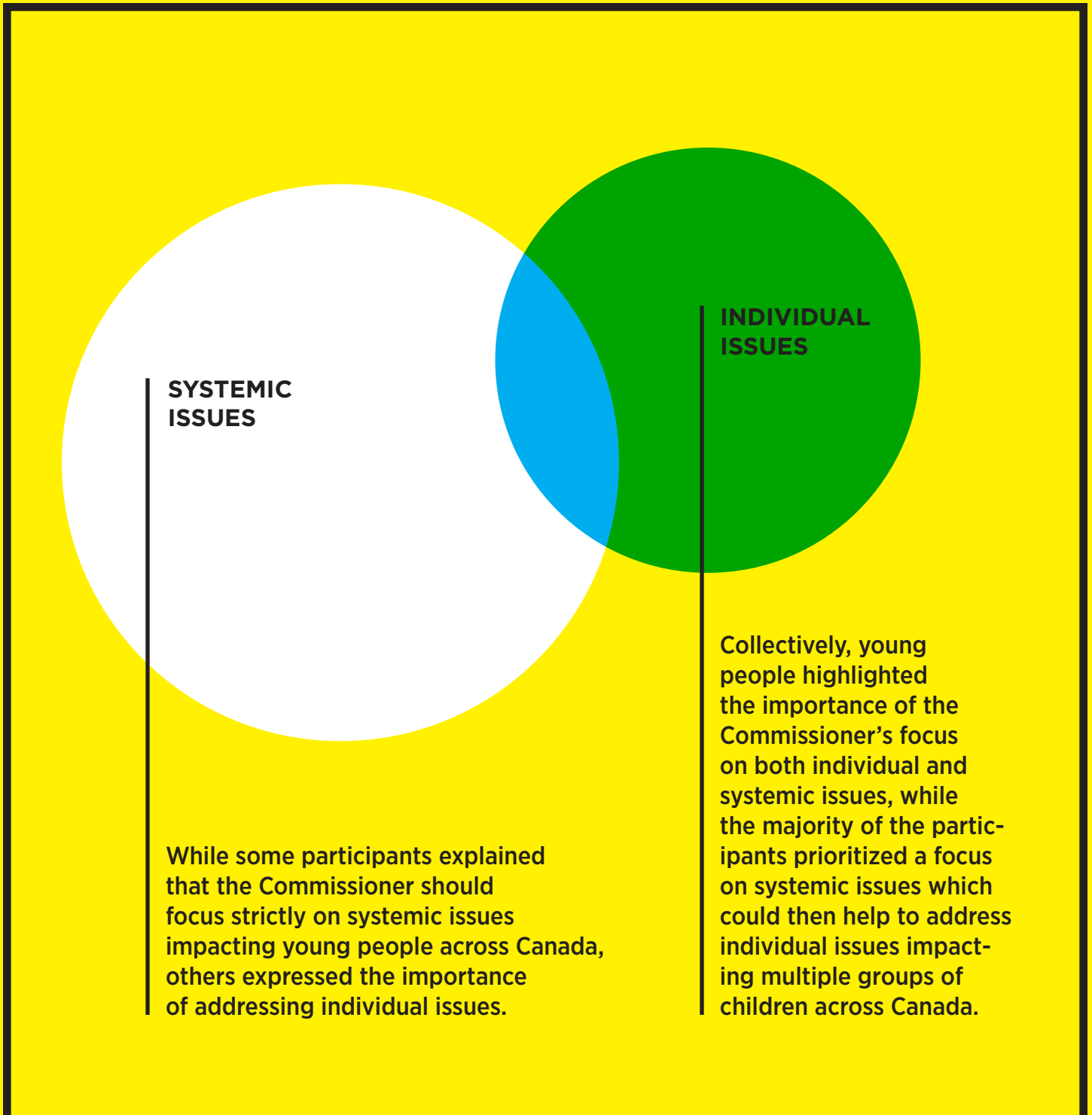
# What role should children have in choosing the Commissioner?





QUESTION 5:

# Should the Commissioner work with individual children or focus on systemic issues?



**SYSTEMIC  
ISSUES**

While some participants explained that the Commissioner should focus strictly on systemic issues impacting young people across Canada, others expressed the importance of addressing individual issues.

**INDIVIDUAL  
ISSUES**

Collectively, young people highlighted the importance of the Commissioner's focus on both individual and systemic issues, while the majority of the participants prioritized a focus on systemic issues which could then help to address individual issues impacting multiple groups of children across Canada.

QUESTION 6:

## What powers should the Commissioner have?

The participants agreed that it would be important for the Commissioner to have the following powers:

**Investigative powers.**

**Power to bring young people's voices to decision-makers.**

**Power to enhance policies and legislation impacting young people.**

**Power to advocate for children's rights in Parliament.**

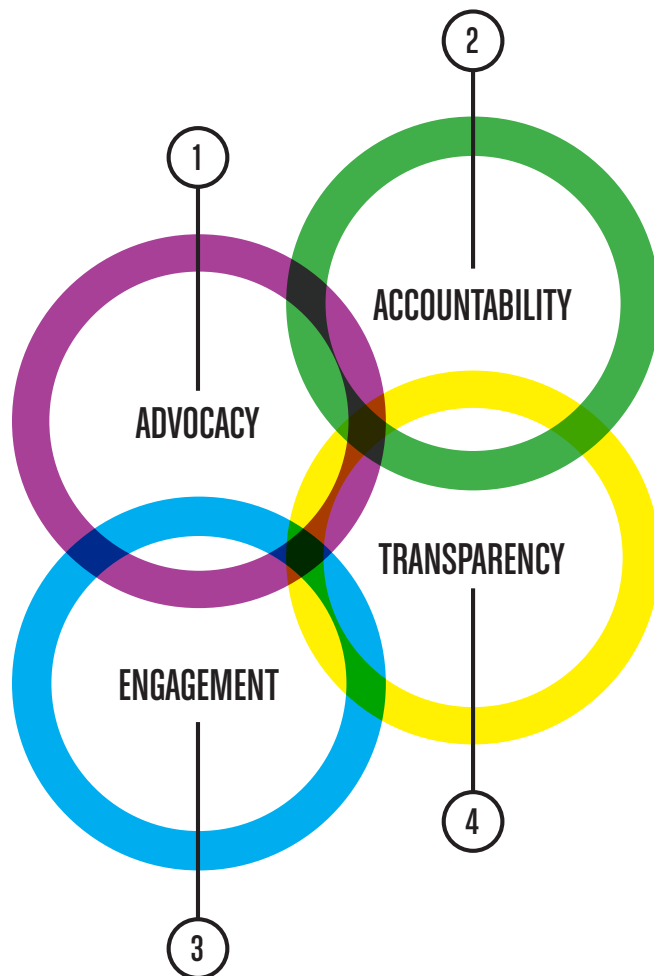
**Power over Federal jurisdictions that impact young people.**

**Power to hold government accountable for issues impacting children.**

## QUESTION 7:

# What does accountability, transparency, advocacy, and engagement look like?

Young people outlined some of the following characteristics as central to defining and unpacking the concepts of accountability, transparency, advocacy, and engagement.



### 1 **Advocacy**

- Engaging directly with young people
- Providing space for young people to express their perspectives/stories (in person and online)
- Listening to young people's viewpoints and suggestions
- Valuing their lived experiences in decision making

### 2 **Accountability**

- Setting metrics and goals
- Showcasing timelines/pressing benchmarks
- Providing evaluations
- Including young people in decision making

### 3 **Engagement**

- Establishing collaborations with young people
- Developing initiatives with children and youth
- Partnering with Provincial and Territorial Child and Youth Advocate Offices
- Connecting with various groups of young people from different social lines of difference

### 4 **Transparency**

- Outlining intentions and expectations
- Publicizing data to the public (reports)
- Developing annual reports about issues impacting young people
- Keeping promises

QUESTION 8:

## What age group and who should the Commissioner focus on?

The participants agreed that the Commissioner should focus on supporting all groups of young people across Canada, especially young people facing challenging circumstances.

# 25

Most of the participants recommended that the Commissioner support young people up until the age of 25.



# 29

Although some of the participants explained that support should be available up until the age of 29.

For instance, newcomer children and youth, young people with disabilities, young people engaged in the child welfare system/youth justice system, young people struggling with mental health issues, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) young people, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, among others.

Most of the participants recommended that the Commissioner support young people up until the age of 25, although some of the participants explained that support should be available up until the age of 29 for various reasons.

For instance, young people who are institutionalized through systems such as the child welfare system may require additional support and protections, as their development and complex trauma histories can impact their access to rights and resources and realization of rights and recourses.



QUESTION 9:

## How can the Commissioner help kids who need them most?

The participants provided a range of proposed recommendations on how a Commissioner can help young people across the country. The following points highlight some of these key suggestions:



Visit service-delivery sites to provide support and obtain insight on how services can be improved to better young people's lives.



Meet with young people to understand what issues are impacting their lives, listen to their lived experiences, and support their recommendations for change.



Develop initiatives for young people to work with the Commissioner's office to combat systemic issues impacting young people.

Represent children in Parliament.



Provide avenues through social media for young people to express their viewpoints and reach out for support.

The Honourable Rosemary Moodie  
Senator for Ontario

Senate of Canada, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4

Tel: (613) 947-7237

[rosemary.moodie@sen.parl.gc.ca](mailto:rosemary.moodie@sen.parl.gc.ca)  
[www.senmoodie.sencanada.ca/en/](http://www.senmoodie.sencanada.ca/en/)



@SenMoodie  
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