

# THE FREE PRESS UP FRONT

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## Woman trying to adopt baby

*Mother dying and she wants daughter put in Prince George home, but MCF won't approve it*

By **CHRISTIANA WIENS**

*Free Press staff writer*

In Melanie Williamson's rented home there is a fully furnished room, complete with a crib, closet of clothes and toys, but no baby.

The Prince George woman has been waiting for the provincial government to release a baby from a Terrace foster home since February 14.

But it's not her baby. The baby's birth mother is Joanne Turton, a Fort St. James woman now living in Prince George who says she is dying of cancer. Melanie and her husband Rob are Joanne's choice for adoptive parents.

Melanie, Joanne and a friend approached Children and Families Minister Ed John at a press conference Tuesday to demand the ministry stop stalling and clarify their position.

"I want to know what their plans are," says Melanie. "If they are going to keep her in care forever why don't they say so? That way we can be prepared and I can quit chasing my tail."

The ministry has no official comment on the matter, saying that because the case is before the courts, they are not legally allowed to comment on case specifics. They would confirm they have had a number of conversations with Melanie regarding the custody of the child.

After the very public conversation Tuesday, Allen Cummings, ministerial assistant to Ed John, has started looking into the file and made inquiries to the deputy and assistant deputy ministers.

"We followed up on that right away with senior ministry officials," he says. "Some-



Children and Families minister Ed John is confronted by Melanie Williamson at the Coast Inn of the North Tuesday afternoon. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

times just one call from the minister's office can get thing jumping pretty quick."

Joanne Turton had her child taken away from her by ministry staff after police found her drunk and arguing with a friend in a Prince Rupert hotel room.

"There's no good way to say it," says Melanie. "It wasn't right but she's worked hard to

make things right ever since. Joanne realizes she's made some mistakes."

She had been staying at a Terrace transition house where she was hiding from the baby's father, who has allegedly threatened to harm Joanne. The transition house is now considering naming a future residence after Joanne's native name, because they

admire her strength.

"She's just the kind of client we like to have here," says a house spokesperson.

The ministry has applied for, and received, two temporary three-month orders allowing the foster parents to keep the baby.

The child will stay in foster care in Terrace until the judge can confirm Joanne's illness

through doctor's records and even then the Williamsons must complete home studies and criminal record checks before they can be accepted as foster parents. Most of the checks have been completed already but results of a criminal record check are expected to take a least six months to come back.

"It's just another tactic, they don't care how long she has to live," she says.

Melanie has visited the baby in Terrace, with ministry consent and funding. She considers the continued indecision on the ministry's part a waste of time and money.

With father Walter Tylee now interested in securing custody for himself, Melanie says she'll settle for restricted foster parent status — a move that would allow both birth parents to see their daughter here more regularly, while offering the Williamsons a chance to prove their abilities.

Restricted foster parents take care of only one child in care at a time.

"I don't want to be a foster parent, I want to apply for adoption," she says. "But I don't want to exclude the birth father either, he has rights."

Melanie also says she's prepared to open her house to Joanne for as long as Joanne would like so that the girl can know her mother.

"The ministry always says it wants to do what's best for the children but what is best for this baby?," she says. "We need to know one way or the other what is going to happen so we can plan around it and be prepared for what's coming in the end."



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