

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release



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For Immediate Release
December 12, 2018

FNLC DEMANDS OVERHAUL OF SYSTEMS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and Səilwətaʔt/Seilwíth (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver: On Monday Dec.10, the Representative for Children and Youth released the report *Alone and Afraid: Lessons learned from the ordeal of a child with special needs and his family*, which exposes British Columbia's deeply flawed system of services to support children with complex needs.

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated, "The report details stories which are disturbing and traumatic with long lasting consequences. Immediate action is needed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to make profound changes to severely overburdened and underfunded systems and ensure the safety and well-being of our children with special needs."

Significantly, the report recommends that MCFD ensure identification and involvement of an Indigenous child or youth's family, community and culture at the first point of contact with any MCFD service and continue this involvement on an ongoing basis. This should include, in consultation with Indigenous communities and organizations, the creation of guidelines for social workers working with Indigenous families, with resources to help them do this work.

"Many of our First Nations children have special needs and some are found in vulnerable situations," notes Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "The MCFD and other government ministries listed in this report have more than enough information to identify where the deficiencies in their services lie. It is now a time of action to significantly improve the quality of life for our children and families and make sure that not one child is missed."

"The child who is the focus of this report is not only special needs, is also of indigenous ancestry. MCFD clearly failed to recognize the Indigenous connection and reach out to his family and community. They also failed to provide critical supports to the mother who was struggling to provide adequate care to her son from the onset. The suffering this child had to endure as a result of these systemic breakdowns could have been avoided if proper measures had been put into place by MCFD", said Cheryl Casimer of

the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “It is obvious that much more collaboration needs to take place between MCFD and Indigenous families and communities to ensure that children in care receive the adequate care and supports they are entitled to and that cultural connections be a contributing factor in the MCFD service plan. This is yet another unfortunate example of a broken system that continues to fail our children and this has to stop”.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

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