

# FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

## News Release

June 26, 2023

### **FNLC calls for MCFD Minister Mitzi Dean to resign immediately, urges Province to completely overhaul beleaguered foster care system**

(xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) – The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is deeply aggrieved at Hon. Mitzi Dean’s inadequate approach and ongoing lack of accountability in response to the horrific abuse of two First Nations children in foster care. The FNLC is calling for Minister Dean to resign immediately, and for the Province to work with First Nations to eradicate the mistreatment of First Nations children in care, including supporting First Nations’ jurisdiction of First Nations children.

On Friday, June 16, Chilliwack provincial court sentenced two former foster parents to 10 years in prison for manslaughter and aggravated assault that took place in Lake Errock between 2020 and 2021. According to the evidence, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) hadn’t checked on the children in their care for seven months.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations said, “This tragedy reminds me of the Savannah Hall case from 2001, in which a three-year-old Indigenous girl in foster care died of abuse and suffocation. The coroner’s verdict determined it was a homicide and included 17 recommendations to MCFD. And yet, here we are again. Case after case, the Province of British Columbia offers condolences and promises to ensure it won’t happen again. Clearly, this is not enough. The Ministry must conduct a thorough systematic review of its child protection and guardianship policies, practices, and procedures pertaining to First Nations children and youth, and all child protection cases and placements involving First Nations families. These tragedies are the result of negligence and a lack of systemic oversight, and First Nations children are the innocent victims of BC’s failures. I urge Minister Dean to recognize this and resign immediately.”

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated, “When I heard about this terrible case, I was immediately nauseous. This was not an isolated incident, and it was entirely preventable. I am greatly disappointed to see that MCFD has not demonstrated any sincere steps toward accountability and prevention at a broader level. Everything about this case - the placement of children into a foster home where the foster parents asked for support they did not receive, the unbearably lengthy period of abuse, and the complete lack of oversight from Ministry employees and officials - leads to a deep concern about MCFD’s ability to effectively provide ‘child protection’ services. I call on Minister Dean to acknowledge the grinding severity of this failure by resigning immediately. Furthermore, MCFD must develop robust accountability mechanisms, including monitoring, reviewing, and reporting, specific to First Nations children and families, to ensure the department’s policies, procedures, and practices are understood and followed at all offices across British Columbia.”



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Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Political Executive said, “The lack of accountability and action in the aftermath of such an atrocious situation is dehumanizing. First Nations children and families deserve better. MCFD continues to fail our communities without any significant consequence, even when there is the death of a child. Hon. Mitzi Dean must step down as the Minister of Children and Family Development, and the Province must commit to eradicating the abuse and mistreatment of First Nations children in care by supporting First Nations' jurisdiction of First Nations children. This support must include developing appropriate policies as well as providing adequate funding to increase capacity and ensure longevity. It is unacceptable that these horrific situations continue to take place in foster homes across BC. We need to see real accountability measures in order for First Nations communities and families to heal, and MCFD must undergo substantial reviews and changes to prevent trauma and abuse going forward.”

The First Nations Leadership Council anticipates, and would be very supportive of, the Representative for Children and Youth undertaking a fulsome investigation into the horrific systemic breakdowns that contributed to this child’s death, in an effort to identify the necessary systemic improvements to prevent similar injuries or deaths from occurring in the future. We call on the Province to proactively commit to implementation of the recommendations that will arise out of such an investigation, in recognition of the need for a drastic overhaul.

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*The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).*

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