

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

December 15, 2020

FNLC Demands Urgent Action to Support First Nations Youth Transitioning Out of Care

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is calling upon the Provincial and Federal Governments to take immediate action and support First Nations youth currently aging out of the child welfare system, and to commit focused resources to support our communities in bringing our members home.

Today the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) released her report, "A Parents Duty" focused on transitions for youth aging out of care. This report builds in decades of research that has shown youth raised in government care consistently face poorer outcomes than other youth, and are more likely to experience homelessness, substance use and mental health challenges, and poverty. A review of the current programs offered by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, including the Agreements with Young Adults Program and the Tuition Waiver Program, are not being accessed by many youth aging out of care, and that Indigenous youth are even less likely to access these programs than their non-Indigenous peers despite representing over 50% of all youth in care, and over 50% of youth expected to age out in the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Task Group Member, stated: "There must be immediate action taken to ensure all First Nations youth expected to age out of the child welfare system at this time, have the resources and supports they need to be safe and successful. These youth are aging out of care in the middle of a worldwide pandemic and an opioid crisis. We are calling upon the Provincial and Federal governments to work closely with First Nations to develop a comprehensive strategy to support these youth, and to support our communities in meeting their needs so that no one falls through the cracks. This must include working with us to address educational outcomes for First Nations youth in and from care and the ongoing socio-economic gaps that exist for our communities."

"The over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care illustrates the ongoing impacts of the colonial child welfare system for our peoples. We are in a time of change as our Nations resume jurisdiction over child and family services, but in the interim, there must be immediate actions taken to support those youth that are in the system now," stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer. "We are aware of encampments that have been established for youth in the Cowichan Valley, many of whom are Indigenous and who are coming out of the child welfare system. This is unacceptable and is a direct violation of the very basic human rights they are entitled to. Chiefs in BC have called upon the Provincial government to immediately work with us to develop an Indigenous youth housing strategy. We are calling for immediate action to be taken to respond to this request. We further call upon the Province to ensure no youth currently in care ages out into homelessness by extending the emergency measures beyond March 31st, 2021 for any youth without a secure housing plan."

BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee concluded, "As we move towards the resumption of jurisdiction over child and family services for our Nations, we need adequate resources to support us in bringing these young people home, including for infrastructure and healing. We thank the RCY for highlighting the challenges faced by youth aging out of care and assert that there must be direction taken from First



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Nations in planning and caring for our own children and youth. This is our inherent right and what is legally required by *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis Children, Youth and Families*. Resources must be directed to keeping our children and youth within their families and communities, so we do not have to deal with the ongoing issue of youth aging out of care.”

The FNLC would also like to acknowledge the tireless work and advocacy of Katherine McParland to bring attention to the issues of youth homelessness, and the super-highway to homelessness that is created for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system. We remain committed to carrying on the work we began with Katherine and are so grateful for her commitment to continuously championing better outcomes for our young people.

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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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