

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

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UNION OF B.C. INDIAN CHIEFS  
54<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
SEPTEMBER 27<sup>TH</sup> TO 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2022  
MUSQUEAM COMMUNITY CENTRE, X<sup>W</sup>MƏΘK<sup>W</sup>ƏYƏM (MUSQUEAM TERRITORY)

Resolution no. 2022-53

**RE: Calling a Provincial Inquiry into the Theft of Funds from Indigenous Youth in Foster Care by Former Fraudulent Child Protection Worker Robert Riley Saunders**

**WHEREAS** the axá i? scuntət i? tı ǰa?xıtət ǰı i? nąqsiltət/ Syilx Nation Family Declaration, ratified on July 26, 2022, states:

**Preamble:** It is our inherent right, that we are the only ones to say what governs us, for what are the best interests, the good health, and well-being of our children and people, and our sqilx<sup>w</sup>/syilx/s?uk<sup>w</sup>naqinx ways.

**Article 1:** We are the decision-makers of our sqilx<sup>w</sup>, syilx, s?uk<sup>w</sup>naqinx ways. Our ways are central to the health and wellbeing of all sqilx<sup>w</sup>/syilx/s?uknaqinx Peoples, including our children and families. We ensure this is intertwined with who they are and their roots.

**Article 6:** We, the sqilx<sup>w</sup>/syilx/s?uknaqinx Peoples are responsible for providing for one another; no one is left in need. We share what we have unconditionally, and we all share in the rights and responsibilities which ensure the collective well-being of our sqilx<sup>w</sup>/syilx/s?uknaqinx Nation.

**WHEREAS** the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the government of Canada has adopted without qualification, and has, alongside the government of BC, passed legislation committing to implement, affirms:

**Article 7(1):** Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person.

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Certified copy of a resolution adopted on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of September of 2022 in x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyə<sup>m</sup> (Musqueam) territory

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President

**Article 26(2):** Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.

**Article 22(1):** Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration;

**WHEREAS** the *Indian Act*, first proclaimed in 1876, gave the federal government control over most aspects of Indigenous people’s lives and empowered the residential school system that operated in BC from 1861 to 1984. The primary objective of the residential schools was to eliminate any vestige of Aboriginality, replacing it with a Euro-western culture, knowledge, and spirituality. Residential schools were also the primary mechanism of First Nations child welfare in Canada between 1879 and 1946; and

**WHEREAS** in 2006, Dr. Cindy Blackstock and the Assembly of First Nations filed a human rights complaint against Canada and the discriminatory systems that have failed Indigenous children across the country. That same year, the “Hughes Review” was released, assessing the BC child welfare system and providing 62 recommendations. This report led to the creation of the BC Office for the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY). The RCY was the first independent “watchdog” entity for the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the child welfare services that the Ministry provides, reporting directly to the legislature. Despite this independent body, issues regarding discrimination in how MCFD provided or failed to provide services to Indigenous peoples in BC continued to abound;

**WHEREAS** in 2018, it was discovered that former fraudulent, disgraced Child Protection worker Robert Riley Saunders had spent over a decade stealing support services funding from mostly Indigenous youth in foster care. A lack of accountability and oversight, as well as refusal by MCFD workers and managers to listen to numerous complaints regarding Saunders’ conduct by Indigenous Band workers and community members, allowed Saunders to steal over \$460,000 from youth who were on his case load. These crimes continued for over 10 years before being noticed, leaving youth without services, destitute and homeless, struggling to survive and who were not believed by the adults around them when they spoke out against Saunders. It was also discovered that Saunders had applied and received the role of a Child Protection worker with a fraudulent social work degree. That the MCFD would fail to notice both a falsified degree and a decade’s worth of fraudulent activity by one of their workers demonstrates a complete lack of accountability, oversight, and willingness to listen to and collaborate with Indigenous communities and the vulnerable youth in their care; and

**WHEREAS** the *Syilx Okanagan Nation Chiefs’ Executive Council* is demanding an independent public inquiry into the actions and policies of the Ministry for Children and Family Development that allowed former, fraudulent and disgraced Child Protection worker Robert Riley Saunders to steal support funds from youth in Ministry Care for over 10 years, as well as the lack of oversight by his supervisors, and all managers involved who had a responsibility to oversee his actions as a BC Public Service employee, and as Directors under the *Child, Family and Community Services Act*.

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**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly fully support the Okanagan Nation Alliance's formal demand for an independent public inquiry by the Attorney General into the many systemic failures of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) that led to the direct harm of dozens of Indigenous youth by a BC Public Service employee; and

**THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly call upon Canada and the Province of BC to ensure that any and all recommendations that result from this inquiry are implemented with the resources required to ensure long-lasting and meaningful systemic changes to the child welfare system in BC, in order to fulfill their obligations to reconciliation with First Nations and all Indigenous guests within the province.

**Moved:** Chief Greg Gabriel, Penticton Indian Band  
**Seconded:** Chief Keith Crow, Lower Similkameen Indian Band  
**Disposition:** Carried  
**Date:** September 28, 2022

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