

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

NEWS RELEASE

May 3, 2016

First Nations Leadership Council Strongly Supports RCY Report Condemning Wide-Ranging and Biased Plecas Review

(Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver) Senior First Nations leadership in BC are thanking Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, BC's Representative for Children and Youth, for her recent special report detailing serious concerns about the unbalanced review carried out by Mr. Bob Plecas for the Province of BC.

The RCY's report is titled "Implementation of the Plecas Review, Part One: Decision Time" and highlights that the Plecas Review was created without any input from Aboriginal leadership or the RCY Office.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of UBCIC, stated, "We fully support and totally commend Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond for continuing to fight for the inclusion of Aboriginal voices into highly sensitive top-level discussions around child welfare. Mr. Plecas' complete and offensive disregard for Aboriginal input reflects an absence of a balanced perspective and indicates that his report is lacking important and essential information regarding the child welfare crisis in BC."

BCAFN Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson added, "As Indigenous Peoples, our families, our communities and our children are central to who we are and why we do what we do. The Plecas report and the government's response with respect to it is unacceptable. We must be innovative in our approach by focusing on prevention and permanency. The Plecas report tells us what we already know about the child welfare in BC, however now is the time to engage our leadership and those in our communities to ensure we take an inclusive and collaborative approach to addressing the child welfare crisis in BC. We need action and not just words, our children's future depends on it."

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit, concluded, "The First Nations Leadership Council organizations have consistently and clearly stated that significant and real change is required, as well as direct investments to First Nations communities to support First Nations' children and families. What is certain is that there are far too many First Nations children in care in this province and we must work together to effect the positive changes so desperately needed to lower the disproportionate and dreadful statistics."



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Background

In 2015 Mr. Plecas was hired as a special independent advisor to Premier Clark and the Minister of Children and Family development, Hon. Stephanie Cadieux, to review the J.P. case, but his mandate was expanded to include an “interim report on the comparative analysis of applicable legislation, policy, standards and practice and recommendations for the improvement of Ministry and other systemic processes.”

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit, and BC Assembly of First Nations, working together as the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), have been extremely vocal in their opposition to the Plecas Review recommendations to limit the RCY position, as articulated in an open letter on December 14, 2015 (attached). The FNLC sent a further letter dated April 28, 2016 (attached), expressing concerns about the Province’s identification of \$100M to develop a workplan to implement recommendations from a report that is so clearly biased.

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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.

For further comment please contact:

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President, Union of BC Indian Chiefs:	604-684-0231
Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Political Executive:	778-875-2157
Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson, BC Assembly of First Nations:	250-852-1143

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

December 14, 2015

Premier Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC
V8V 1X4

OPEN LETTER: FNLC Opposes Plecas Report Recommendations to Limit RCY

Dear Premier Clark,

Mr. Plecas has written a report called *Decision Time* as a special independent advisor to you and the Minister for Children and Families. Mr. Plecas was originally hired to review the J.P. case but his mandate was expanded to include an “interim report on the comparative analysis of applicable legislation, policy, standards and practice and recommendations for the improvement of Ministry, and other, systemic processes”.

Unfortunately, Mr. Plecas presents a wide-ranging, biased survey of child welfare and politics, including a unilateral public assessment of the value of independent oversight and the performance of the current Representative for Children and Youth. We find this attack on this valued oversight role to be deeply offensive and inappropriate. Let us be clear in stating that we fully support the important work of the Representative for Children and Youth.

The report references Grand Chief Edward John being brought on “to help find ways to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care”. We find this to be an attempt by Mr. Plecas to minimize a need to consult with First Nations’ on these important issues by offloading and mischaracterizing Grand Chief Edward John’s important role as Special Advisor.

We must point out that Grand Chief John has our support in his role as a Special Advisor to the Ministry of Children and Families and his mandate to specifically:

- *Provide a focused role on creating permanency for Aboriginal children in care, particularly those in care through continuing custody orders (in care until reaching the age of majority);*
- *After the release of the Council of the Federation report, assign follow-up for British Columbia (encourage national-level leadership and facilitate provincial level discussions) and;*
- *As necessary, assist the MCFD Minister in developing advice to cabinet members on these areas.*

We take great offense at Mr. Plecas’ cavalier observation that the deaths and serious injuries to children known to the MCFD “occur rarely.” From July 2007 to September 2015 there have been 2981 instances of critical injuries and deaths. To be clear, the MCFD is aware of 814 deaths and 2077 critical injuries in the last eight years. For the current fiscal year of 2015-2016, there are 380 critical injury reports and 90 deaths of children in care. We need to bring closure and honour the grieving families.



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Mr. Plecas confirms what the Representative has already reported on extensively, that the MCFD budget has a shortfall of at least \$100 million over the past number of years. We urge you to make immediate financial investments. More importantly though, we urge you to work with us to ensure those investments actually help First Nations children and youth who are the mainstay of the children in need in BC.

We have asked the Representative to convene a meeting among herself, the First Nations Leadership Council, the First Nations Health Council and your Deputies to discuss the state of child welfare and how to move forward in the most appropriate manner.

We will also be writing to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly to indicate that we hope the utterly unfair review of the performance of the Representative can be withdrawn fully and that should such a review be conducted, it should be done in the proper forum, before the Standing Committee on Children and Youth that the Representative has worked closely with for 9 years and has appeared before in excess of 30 times.

What is certain is that significant and real change is required, as well as direct investments to First Nations communities to support First Nations' children and families. Unfortunately, the Plecas Report falls significantly short and appears to be an attempt to discredit the important work of a respected First Nations individual and office holder. This report represents a wasted opportunity to effect the positive change so desperately needed in BC.

Sincerely,

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT:



Grand Chief Edward John



Robert Phillips



Cheryl Casimer

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS:



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip



Chief Bob Chamberlin



Chief Judy Wilson

On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:



Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson

CC: Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth
Grand Chief Doug Kelly, First Nations Health Council
Hon. Stephanie Cadieux, Ministry of Children and Family Development

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

April 28th, 2016



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Minister Stephanie Cadieux
Ministry of Child and Family Development
PO BOX 9057
STN Prov Govt
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E2

Dear Premier Clark and Minister Cadieux,

We are writing with respect to the Province's acceptance and implementation of Mr. Plecas' report *Decision Time*, which was released in October 2015. We understand that the Province has identified \$100 million dollars to develop a workplan to implement recommendations from this report.

As articulated in our previous correspondence of December 14th, 2016, Mr. Plecas' report presents a wide-ranging, biased survey of child welfare and politics, including a unilateral public assessment of the value of independent oversight and the performance of the current Representative for Children and Youth (RCY). We found his report to be unhelpful and inappropriate, especially with respect to commentary regarding the oversight role of the RCY.

Furthermore, Plecas did not meet with representative organizations which in turns reflects the absence of perspective and important information regarding the child welfare crisis in BC. It is unacceptable that the Province chooses to fund recommendations from a report that clearly lacks important and relevant information that would provide for informed recommendations.

In addition to his disrespectful approach, we also took offense to his cavalier observation that the deaths and serious injuries to children known to the Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD) rarely occur. From July 2007 to September 2015 there were 2981 instances of critical injuries and deaths. To be clear, the MCFD is aware of 814 deaths and 2077 critical injuries in the last eight years. For the 2015-2016 fiscal year, there are 380 critical injury reports and 90 deaths of children in care. We need to bring closure and honour the grieving families.

It is stunning that your government is supporting the recommendations from this report and acting on them with significant implementation funding. We cannot emphasize enough the importance and need to reconsider your government's approach to Mr. Plecas' recommendations. As we engage our communities and leadership at the upcoming First Nations Child and Family Meeting in May, we urge you to work with us, our leaders, experts and child-servicing agencies to ensure any investments made actually help and directly support First Nations children, youth, families and communities.


Significant and real change is required, as well as direct investments to First Nations communities to support First Nations children and families. We have clearly heard from Grand Chief Ed John in his capacity as special advisor to the Province on Children and Families that investments need to be made at the community level, especially the need for more social workers. Investments would be better suited in First Nations communities rather than within the Ministry. The Plecas Report and your government's financial commitment to implement it is a wasted opportunity to effect the positive change in Indigenous child welfare that is so desperately needed in BC.


Sincerely,

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the **FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT**


Grand Chief Edward John



Robert Phillips


Cheryl Casimer

On behalf of the **UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS**


Grand Chief Stewart Phillip


Chief Bob Chamberlin


Kukpi7 Judy Wilson

On behalf of the **BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS**


Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson