

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Media Release



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FNLC Statement on contracted Residential agencies for Children and Youth in Care

Coast Salish Traditional Territory/Vancouver: The First Nations Leadership Council is outraged at the continued risk that Indigenous youth in government care experience in government contracted residential agencies.

The First Nations Leadership Council has learned that Indigenous youth in government care continue to be put at risk by the Ministry of Children and Family Development failing to monitor and ensure simple administrative tasks such as criminal records checks are completed for staff working with our most vulnerable youth at contracted residential agencies.

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Political Executive, stated “We will not stand by and watch while one more of our youth are harmed or die while in government care. The system doesn’t work for us and we continue to advocate for a First Nations child and family well-being system that is based on self-determination and is fully funded and resourced.”

British Columbia’s Representative for Children and Youth announced yesterday that yet another contracted residential agency in the Lower Mainland was closed in May of this year due to several serious concerns related to staff who have gang-affiliations and drug use between staff and youth, including offering youth cocaine. Because of this closure 18 youth, youth who have likely experienced trauma and many moves, have had to be removed and placed in yet another resource. Of those 18 youth, 14 are Indigenous, another unacceptable over-representation of our youth in the broken child welfare system. Over the last number of years and 3 contracted residential agency closures, a disproportionate number of the 70 impacted youth have been Indigenous.

There has been no investment in First Nations residential services, despite these outrageous statistics. The First Nations Leadership Council expects this to change as soon as possible.

Chief Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “We are outraged that the Province was aware of these issues for a number of years and our youth continued to be exposed to unacceptable and avoidable risk. This must be addressed immediately. The province must have accountability in its actions.”

The RCY released the report, Broken Promises, Alex's Story in 2017. That report detailed the tragic circumstances of a suicide of an Indigenous young man who had been placed in a contracted residential agency where unqualified and inexperienced staff exposed him to an intolerable level of risk. At that time the RCY made recommendations that included ensuring ALL contracted residential agency staff have a completed criminal record check. As reported by the RCY, less than half of BC's contracted residential agencies have complied with that recommendation.

BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee stated, "Removing our children from their families and communities in the name of safety and then exposing them to further harm in these contracted residential agencies is unacceptable and must stop now."

This situation cannot and must not continue. Removing an Indigenous child from his family, community and culture is a significant trauma and done with the premise of safety. The young man in Alex's Story did not experience safety while in government care and now yet another contracted agency was unable to provide a safe environment for our youth.

The First Nations Leadership Council is asking Minister Conroy to provide a clear plan that outlines how they will ensure our youth are not continued to be placed in sub-standard contracted resources with staff who have criminal backgrounds, little to no training and expose youth to high-risk activities, including drug use. We will not stand for one more of our youth experiencing any further risk while "in care" of government.

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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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