

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

NEWS RELEASE



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

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FNLC Calls for Immediate Implementation of the Recommendations in the RCY's Report "Caught in the Middle"

(X̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), S̱ḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish) and sə̱lilw̱ətaʔ4/sə̱lilw̱ituh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is deeply disturbed with the findings reported in the Representative for Children and Youth's (RCY) most recent publication "*Falling through the Cracks*" which tells the story of a young man whose life and eventual death highlight the failings of the current interprovincial child welfare system, and the lack of trauma-informed practices. "Romain's" life emphasizes how a lack of oversight in child welfare service delivery between provinces can have life-threatening and tragic consequences.

The report describes Romain's tumultuous and traumatic journey as a young man of mixed European, Barbadian and Indigenous ancestry, who was found to have been moved 40 times in his short life. Alberta Children's Services and BC's Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) transferred him back and forth between provinces, in multiple community-based, familial, psychiatric and youth justice placements without any coordinated and trauma-informed response from either province. His family continuously sought support for his needs, but the RCY found that the support services provided throughout Romain's life were inadequate to meet the needs of him or his family. Romain eventually died from a fentanyl overdose at the all too young age of 17 years while in care of an emergency staffed resource in BC.

The RCY has recommended a review and change to the Ministry of Children and Family Development interprovincial protocol agreement, as well as practice and policy shifts to the coordination and management of interprovincial cases by staff at all levels. The RCY has also highlighted the need for culturally appropriate and trauma-informed service delivery, and the need for stronger residential resources to meet the needs of children and youth with complex needs. The FNLC agrees with and supports the recommendations, with urgency.

"We cannot continue to allow children to fall through the cracks. The risk is too great, and Romain's story is evidence of that," stated Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Task Group. "This report highlights

the multiple systemic failures that occurred during this young man's short life. His death could have been prevented had he and his family received the supports and services they obviously needed. Romain's life was valuable and instead of being treated as such, he was passed around from placement to placement without any real consideration for his life or his needs."

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, "We send our thoughts and prayers to Romain's family and loved ones. MCFD and all other provincial child welfare agencies must recognize this preventable tragedy as the deadly result of their gross inaction in caring for children and families. All of the recommendations made by the RCY in this report need to be implemented immediately. Children's lives are at stake".

"We hope that the Minister of Children and Family Development will thoroughly read this report and see the urgent need to do the right thing and implement the recommendations," concluded BC Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee. "The First Nations Leadership Council remains committed to compel BC and Canada to immediately address all gaps in services that are creating devastating impacts upon our children and families."

For further comment please contact:

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Union of BC Indian Chiefs: 250-320-7738

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Task Group: 778-875-2157

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations: 250-981-2151