



News Release

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Death of Youth in Care Sparks Calls by First Nations Leadership and Advocates for Immediate Action

((X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk^wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ4/səliwitułh (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – Date) Regional and national Indigenous organizations are calling for immediate action and accountability in B.C. over the death of a First Nation youth in a group home.

Earlier this month a First Nations youth, under the care of a Delegated Aboriginal Agency through a consent custody arrangement, was found dead in the closet of his bedroom in the Agency's group home. His body had apparently been hanging there for at least four days. On September 14th, staff informed the youth's mother that her child was AWOL and asked if she had received any communications from him. She informed them she had not, so agency staff proceeded to file a missing person's report. Four days later, on September 18th, his body was discovered in his closet.

Despite the troubling circumstances surrounding the death and repeated requests from the family for a full investigation, the death was immediately deemed a suicide. This was determined without any interviews with the family or further investigation. Abbotsford police and the child coroner assigned to the case quickly determined there were no grounds for further investigation or an autopsy, leading the family to reach out directly for support from First Nation leadership in seeking answers and justice in her son's death. While an autopsy has now been ordered, only after pressure from First Nations Leadership in BC and nationally, serious concerns remain whether a thorough investigation into his death will be conducted by the and the Abbotsford Police.

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs stated, "The lives of First Nations children deserve the same attention and action as any other child. This young man was in the care of a system that was supposed to protect him, yet his body went unnoticed for several days. The decision of the police to not investigate thoroughly into the circumstances of his death is affirmation of the systemic racism that devalues the lives of Indigenous peoples"

"We will not sit idly by while First Nations children and families are left voiceless and grieving," stated Chery Casimer of the First Nations Summit. "We expect a full and thorough investigation into this young man's death, as would be expected for any other child or youth who dies under suspicious circumstances. We will be supporting his family in their calls for justice".

The President of the Indigenous Bar Association in Canada, Drew Lafond, calls on government agencies to treat the lives of Indigenous children as sacred.

"At minimum, this tragedy should be properly and thoroughly investigated independently. The decision by the assigned child coroner and Abbotsford Police to not undertake proper investigation is very concerning given the disturbing facts surrounding the death of this individual," Lafond said.

“How many more times do Indigenous people have to push government agencies to recognize that our Indigenous children’s lives, like those of our fellow Canadians, are also precious and indispensable?”

“We demand immediate action and full accountability by the Abbotsford Police Department and the Province of B.C.”, stated B.C. Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “As the First Nations Leadership Council, our deepest condolences go out to his family and we will be taking every measure to see justice for this young man’s life”.

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