

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Statement

December 5, 2020

Arrest of Robert Riley Saunders: First Nations Leadership Council Demands Justice for his Victims

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.)

The First Nations Leadership Council is relieved to learn of the arrest of disgraced former social worker Robert Riley Saunders, following the approval of several criminal charges by the BC Prosecution Service, and calls to secure justice for all of his victims. Saunders was recently arrested in Alberta and remains in custody. He currently faces charges for fraud, theft, breach of trust and for uttering a forged document.

“For over a decade, this man preyed upon and exploited some of the most vulnerable members of our society for personal profit and gain, while acting under the auspices of the Ministry of Children and Family Development – the branch of our government that is tasked with protecting these young people,” stated Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit. “We were outraged to learn of this disgusting situation and that it went undetected for so long. The individuals who were harmed by this man, along with their families, have been left with lifelong traumas as a direct result of his actions. We are grateful to see that charges have finally been laid and he has been arrested. May justice be served for his victims.”

An internal investigation completed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development found that Robert Saunders had victimized approximately 102 children and youth, over 90 of whom were Indigenous, over the course of his employment as a Ministry social worker. The actions of Saunders contributed to the homelessness, abuse, and further exploitation of many of these youth. It was also found that Saunders had used a forged social work degree from the University of Manitoba as part of his employment application. A class action settlement was approved in BC Supreme Court earlier this fall to provide financial compensation to Saunders’ victims.

“The actions of Robert Saunders are nothing short of complete depravity and must be prosecuted as such,” stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Our children and families have long been devastated by the genocidal policies of the colonial child welfare and justice systems. We hope that the criminal justice system will fully take these realities into account when prosecuting and sentencing Robert Saunders. We offer our continued prayers for his victims and their families in their healing”.

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, of the BC Assembly of First Nations, continued: “We are at a time of change and opportunity, and we hope to see this reflected in the prosecution of Robert Saunders. The fact that nearly all of Robert Saunders’ victims were Indigenous is demonstrative of the broader systemic issues that have placed less value upon our lives, needs and circumstances. True justice will only be served when we see these inequities addressed, and the broad systemic shifts that support Indigenous peoples in having our inherent and fundamental human rights upheld. Let this not be another case where a non-Indigenous man is privileged within the justice system while the Indigenous children and youth he preyed upon are denied the justice they are due”.



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

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

For further information, contact:

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Political Executive:	778-875-2157
Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations:	250-981-2151
Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC:	250-320-7738