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News Release

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FNLC Statement on RCY Report “Illuminating First Nations Childhood Experiences”

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) calls upon the Province of BC to immediately take action to address the serious issues highlighted in the Representative for Children and Youth's report, *“Illuminating First Nations Childhood Experiences”*. Further, the FNLC calls upon all public bodies to support and execute a First Nations data governance strategy, as per the principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) and in alignment with the rights of Indigenous self-determination that are embedded in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

“The statistics illustrated within the Representative’s most recent report are both troubling and unsurprising. As First Nations peoples, the irreparable harms created by the colonial child welfare systems are well known. This report contextualizes that harm in hard data which shows our children are often placed at a greater risk when removed from our families and communities and into strangers’ homes,” stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “It also emphasizes how important it is for our communities and Nations to continue to stand up and assert our inherent right of self-determination over our children and families so that our children can grow up safely, and connected, within our families and communities.”

The Representative’s report found that First Nations children who were in the permanent care of the Province were more than two times more likely to experience a critical injury or death than their non-Indigenous peers, with the majority of injuries being reported for First Nations females. Caregiver mistreatment was the most commonly reported injury for First Nations children and youth, and most commonly occurred in foster placements.

The report also found that First Nations communities were often not notified or involved in planning for their members, and that there was little evidence of culturally grounded or appropriate interventions.

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Task Group member stated, “We are grateful to the Representative for recognizing the need to review and analyze the data held by her office in a distinctions-based way; however, we have concerns on the focus of this data and lack of information gathered on effective interventions and support for our children and youth. Moving forward, First Nations in BC must have access to, and sovereignty over, data and information that can support us as we assert our own laws and jurisdiction over children and families. Further, we call upon the Provincial government to do better when it comes to our children. Our children are not dispensable – a value that is seriously contradicted by findings in this report. Our communities must be included at all stages when our children are placed in care, and every measure be taken to see them placed within their families and communities.”

“The principles of OCAP underscore our rights as First Nations people to self-determine how data pertaining to our peoples is collected, analyzed and disseminated. Data sovereignty is a critical aspect of our ability to exercise our rights as Indigenous peoples,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of

First Nations. "As we sit at tables in our own communities and with our provincial and federal partners regarding assertion of jurisdiction over child and family services, we require specific and relevant data to inform these discussions. We thank the Representative for doing this work and hope we can work with her office to ensure that First Nations in BC have access to, and governance over, their own data."

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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).

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