

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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FNLC outraged by early parole granted to man who stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from Indigenous youth in care

(xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is shocked, appalled and deeply outraged by the decision of the National Parole Board to release Robert Riley Saunders on day parole. The FNLC has condemned the decision and has called for an immediate reversal of the decision.

Saunders was a social worker in Kelowna, BC, who over a period of six- and one-half years stole \$460,000 that was intended to go to vulnerable Indigenous youth. Saunders was convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment. At the time of his sentencing, the FNLC [called](#) the sentence too lenient.

The National Parole Board decision comes just 14 months after Saunders started what was supposed to be five years in custody. The Parole Board acknowledged that the youth suffered as a result of the thefts, but that didn't seem to factor significantly in its decision.

"Despite the calls of many Canadians, and especially First Nations People, this government has chosen not to reform the Canadian Parole system. First Nations people need to have a stronger voice at the Parole hearings when it is First Nations people who are the victims", said Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. "In addition, this decision flies in the face of the spirit of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* which has many sections aimed at protecting Indigenous youth."

Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice-President, added, "Saunders was able to steal money from First Nations youth for 6 ½ years because of the failure of the BC child protection system. With this decision to grant Mr. Saunders parole, the Justice system has once again failed First Nations victims. First Nations people have been victimized by the Justice system for 200 years. It is clearly time for fulsome reform."

Hugh Braker of the First Nations Summit Political Executive said "Many decisions of the National Parole Board are seen as 'Get out of Jail Free' cards while youth victims continue to suffer, many for the rest of their lives. There needs to be a rethink and reimagining of the Canadian Justice system, so there is more alignment between the principles of sentencing and the principles guiding parole. As it is now, First Nations people, and all Canadians, are losing faith in the Parole system and the Justice system in general. These types of decisions by the Parole Board single-handedly bring the administration of Justice into disrepute".

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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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