



Bear Witness Day

April 2026

Jordan's Principle is a legal rule ensuring First Nations children receive the services and supports they need, when they need them.

Celebrated annually on May 10, Bear Witness Day honours Jordan River Anderson and his family for the gift of Jordan's Principle and invites people of all ages to "bear witness" to ensure Jordan's Principle is fully implemented! Teddy bears were Jordan's favourite toy.

Jordan's legacy lives on in all of us who stand up for First Nations children. Public awareness and continued pressure are needed to ensure that the federal government fulfills its legal duty to implement Jordan's Principle in a way that:

- reflects the needs of First Nations children;
- upholds First Nations children's right to substantive equality;
- is grounded in the best interests of the child;
- considers distinct community circumstances; and
- ensures access to culturally relevant services.

Why is Bear Witness Day important?

It has been 20 years since Jordan's family and community gifted his name to the creation of Jordan's Principle, and 10 years since the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (Tribunal) ruled that the federal government is discriminating against First Nations children. The Tribunal's historic decision in 2016 ordered the federal government to stop its discrimination against First Nations children and prevent it from happening again, including through the full and proper implementation of Jordan's Principle.

Since the Tribunal's decision, we have seen that Jordan's Principle is life-saving and life-changing when carried out properly. Unfortunately, a decade later, much more still needs to be done to end the federal government's discrimination in how it implements Jordan's Principle. In 2025, the federal government made unilateral changes to how it implements Jordan's Principle, significantly narrowing access for First Nations children who need products, services, and supports.

The federal government says these changes are meant to return to the “original intent” of Jordan’s Principle. In fact, the changes echo the federal government’s early approach to Jordan’s Principle by prioritizing administration over children and requiring families to prove need, even though the Tribunal has repeatedly affirmed First Nations children’s right to substantive equality. The federal government is applying the same mindset the Tribunal found to be discriminatory, and First Nations children are again bearing the consequences.

The federal government has done little to address the problems with other federal programs that are driving families to place requests to Jordan’s Principle. The evidence shows that Jordan’s Principle is filling gaps in underfunded federal programs, with needs relating to health and mental health, education, and poverty driving requests. There are evidence-based solutions on the books, but the federal government has chosen not to act. The Spirit Bear Plan, for example, is a five-part plan to end inequalities in public services for First Nations children, youth, and families. It calls on Canada, Parliament, government departments, and all public services to address gaps in federally funded programs and to eliminate discriminatory ideologies, policies, and practices across government. The Spirit Bear Plan received unanimous support from the Assembly of First Nations at the 2017 Special Chiefs Assembly.

Full implementation of Jordan’s Principle is one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s top Calls to Action (Call to Action #3) and was echoed by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ Calls for Justice (Call for Justice 3.2). These calls emphasize that equitable access to health, education, and social services is foundational to addressing the legacy of the residential school system, reconciliation, and justice for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Senate of Canada recognizes Bear Witness Day

On February 5, 2026, the Senate of Canada passed a motion recognizing May 10 of each year as Bear Witness Day, a national day of action to honour Jordan River Anderson and his family and to call for the full implementation of Jordan’s Principle. As Senator Francis stated: *We owe it to Jordan and all First Nations children to act with urgency. At the heart of Jordan’s Principle, there are children with real needs, real hopes and real futures who cannot wait.*

Introduced by Senator Brian Francis, supported by Senator Kim Pate, and seconded by Senator Amina Gerba, the motion urged Canadians to “bear witness” to the inequities that First Nations children continue to face in accessing services to meet their needs.

As of 2026, Manitoba is the only province or territory to have a day affirming Jordan’s Principle. The Spirit Bear Day Act was passed by the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba in 2018 to honour Jordan’s memory and annually recognize the importance of Jordan’s Principle on May 10.

Let's Put Our Paws to Work Together!

Help uphold Jordan's Principle by contacting your Member of Parliament to:

- make sure they know about the Senate Motion recognizing Bear Witness Day and ask how they will be honouring the day;
- push for the full implementation of Jordan's Principle; and
- call for the implementation of the Spirit Bear Plan.

Mail to the Prime Minister and any Member of Parliament may be sent postage-free.

You can also write to your provincial or territorial legislative assembly to make Bear Witness Day a recognized day in your province or territory to honour Jordan River Anderson and his family and to call for the full implementation of Jordan's Principle. Contact information for your Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) or Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) can be found online.

Resources

- [Bear Witness Day website](#), including letter templates, Bear Witness Day postcards, and mailing addresses for the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament
- [Jordan's Principle 20th Anniversary Scrapbook](#) highlighting some of the events held in May 2025 to honour the tremendous impact of Jordan River Anderson's life and legacy
- [Jordan's Principle Information Sheet](#) summarizing the Tribunal's orders on Jordan's Principle
- Jordan's Principle website at jordansprinciple.ca
- [Senate of Canada passes a motion recognizing Bear Witness Day](#)
- [Senator Francis' remarks about Bear Witness Day in the Senate](#)
- [Spirit Bear Day Act](#), passed by the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba in 2018
- [Spirit Bear Plan](#) to End Inequalities in Public Services for First Nations Children, Youth, and Families
- [Substantive Equality and Jordan's Principle: Youth-Friendly Information Sheet](#)