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Speaking Notes

Human Rights Complaint News Conference

Ottawa, ON

February 23, 2007



FIRST NATIONS
CHILD & FAMILY
CARING SOCIETY
OF CANADA



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The Department of Indian Affairs website says "A fundamental change in the funding approach of First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies to child welfare is required in order to reverse the growth rate of children coming into care, and in order for the agencies to meet their mandated responsibilities." At the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada we could not agree more and that's why we have worked diligently with the Assembly of First Nations, First Nations child and family service agencies and the Department of Indian Affairs to find out why so many First Nations children were being removed from their families and what could be done about it. In reviewing the available evidence, what is clear is that there are more First Nations children living in state care today than at any time in history - including during the height of the

residential school operations. The over representation of First Nations children in child welfare care is drastic - an analysis of child welfare data from three sample provinces indicates as of May of 2005- 0.67% of all non Aboriginal children were in child welfare care as compared to 10.23% of all Status Indian children. What is also clear is that many of these removals could be prevented if the federal government funded the intensive family and child supports needed to keep children safely at home known as prevention programs and least disruptive measures while actively supporting First Nations to address the poverty, poor housing and substance misuse on reserves.

The good news is this is a tragic problem with a promising solution. In 2005, the Department of Indian Affairs in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations commissioned our organization to oversee a team of more than 20 leading researchers to develop an affordable and evidence based solution. Confirming the findings of the

National Policy Review report completed in 2000 and the quote from the Department of Indian Affairs's own website that I mentioned earlier, we found that the federal funding formula was inadequate to ensure that First Nations child and family service agencies could meet mandated child welfare requirements. Specifically, we found severe funding shortfalls in prevention and least disruptive measures and that the federal government needs to invest an additional 109 million in the first year of a seven year funding cycle to achieve a basic level of equity to what other Canadian children receive.

We are proud of the commendations the Wen: de reports have received from First Nations and the Department of Indian Affairs but we are disappointed that none of the recommendations to redress the overwhelming shortfall of federal child welfare funding have been acted on by the federal government.

Given that the Department acknowledges their funding inequity results in growing numbers of children in care and that giving First Nations child welfare agencies the basic tools they need to help children and families would only cost less than one percent of the 13 billion dollar federal surplus budget - the question for Canadians is not why Canada should act to ensure the equality and safety of First Nations children - the question is why Canada would not do it?

After ten years of research and negotiation and numerous independent reports which have repeatedly shown the inadequacies of the federal funding formula and its negative impacts on First Nations children, we can not wait any longer for the federal government to do the right thing. Because as the Department of Indian Affairs child in care data confirms the numbers of First Nations children being placed in child welfare care is increasing at an alarming rate.

We must courageously stand up for fairness, equality and safety for First Nations children and we hope it will not be too

long before the Government of Canada stands with us by fully implementing the Wen: de solution and investing in First Nations driven sustainable socio-economic development plans. We know many Canadians and Canadian organizations are already on the side of First Nations children receiving equitable child welfare services and we are thankful for your support and friendship.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada is honored to join with the Assembly of First Nations in filing this human rights complaint - we are doing it for the children - we love them enough to stand up for them and give them an equal chance to live safely at home - just like other Canadian children.