

First Nations Education Steering Committee

Suite 113-100 Park Royal South

West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2

www.fnesc.ca



For immediate release

First Nations Child Welfare Ruling Sets the Stage for Improved On-Reserve Services

Jan. 26, 2016 -- Coast Salish Territories / West Vancouver – The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has found the federal government’s underfunding of on-reserve child and family services discriminatory, citing the government’s flawed and inequitable provision of First Nations child welfare and flawed implementation of Jordan’s Principle. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), a First Nations controlled collective organization focused on advancing quality education for all First Nations learners in British Columbia, welcomes the potential of this ruling to improve the wellbeing of First Nations children and families.

“We believe that all children deserve quality education, medical care and other services regardless of where they live,” said Tyrone McNeil, President of the First Nations Steering Committee. “We commend the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations for bringing this issue to the forefront, and believe the decision will have far reaching impact on federal policies that impact First Nations communities.”

In its ruling, the Tribunal ordered the federal government to cease its discriminatory practices and undertake reforms to reflect the findings of its decision. It also called on the federal government to cease applying its narrow definition of Jordan’s Principle. Details regarding compensation to victims and specific reforms are still to be determined.

“Looking at the legacy of residential schools and the inequities that still exist in the education system, we are reminded how closely child welfare and education are bound together in the experience of First Nations people,” said FNESC Executive Director, Deborah Jeffrey. “Over half of children in care in BC are Aboriginal and the graduation rate of Aboriginal children in care is only 40%. It is my hope that this ruling will help transform federal policies and supports for First Nations education, including First Nations schools and post-secondary student supports.”

Aboriginal children in care are the most vulnerable students in the education system and effective, culturally-relevant supports are needed to improve their outcomes. It is hoped that the ruling will have positive implications for the education of First Nations children, including children in care.

The Tribunal’s decision affirms Jordan’s Principle, calling on the government of first contact to pay for the services and seek reimbursement later so that children are not denied services based on jurisdictional disputes. Jordan’s Principle was unanimously passed in the House of Commons in 2007, however, it has not yet been fully implemented. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as part of its final report and recommendations, has called on all levels of government in Canada to fully implement Jordan’s Principle. The way forward will be in the context of the federal liberal government’s stated commitment to the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

-30-

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (www.fnesc.ca) is an independent society committed to improving education for all First Nations learners in British Columbia. FNESC was established by First Nations leadership and it is directed by a board of 110 representatives of First Nations communities.

For further comment please contact:

Thane Bonar, Director of Communications and Policy, FNESC

Direct: 604-355-8649

thaneb@fnesc.ca Twitter @fnesc