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## **Joint Inquest into the Death of First Nation Youth Finally to Commence.**

Toronto (September 16, 2015): The families of six deceased First Nation youth who are being represented by Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST) are relieved that after waiting for three long years since the Inquest was called jointly, the Inquest into the deaths of their children will begin October 5, 2015. The Chief Coroner's office publicly announced the schedule of the Inquest earlier today.

The inquest will examine the circumstance of the deaths of seven First Nation youth: Jethro Anderson in 2000; Curran Strang in 2005; Paul Panacheese in 2006; Robyn Harper in 2007; Reggie Bushie, in 2007; Kyle Morrisseau in 2009; and, Jordan Wabasse, in 2011. All of these youth died while they were attending high school in Thunder Bay, away from their home First Nation communities.

After many delays, legal counsel for six of the families, Christa Big Canoe and Jonathan Rudin of Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto, are glad that the important issues and circumstances that caused these deaths will finally begin to be examined.

Christa Big Canoe stated, "The magnitude of the issues that First Nation youth experience is starting to be recognized more generally but it is the families' hope that this Inquest will provide concrete and meaningful recommendations to prevent future deaths of students that want to seek education and better opportunities."

Jonathan Rudin stated, "The families have been waiting so long and with so many questions about the loss of their children that it is a relief that the Inquest will finally begin." "The families and the NAN communities have waited far too long for this process to commence," said Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. "In 2000, we lost Jethro Anderson, who was only 15 years old. Since then, 6 more young people have been lost. Why are our communities forced to send their children hundreds of kilometers away to get a high school education? When they do, there is a lot anxiety about the fate of their children. We are hopeful that this Inquest will produce meaningful solutions that keep our children safe and allow them to access education without fear of tragic endings."

Due to the similarities in all seven cases, NAN called for a broader inquiry to fully investigate the circumstances surrounding the loss of these youth and to find ways to prevent such tragedies from happening again. NAN received the expressed support of Chiefs and the families of the victims for a Joint Inquest into the deaths of all seven youth, which was announced by the Chief Coroner of Ontario on May 31, 2012. All 7 youth were from First Nations in Nishnawbe Aski Nation Territory.

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