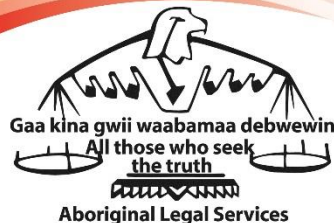




Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

Tuesday June 28, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAN, FAMILIES WELCOME RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE SAFETY, EDUCATION OF YOUTH

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and the families welcome recommendations delivered today by the jury in the inquest into the deaths of seven NAN youth and issued a call for action for governments of Canada and Ontario to begin a process for their immediate implementation.

“This inquest into the deaths of our youth has been a long and difficult process that has taken an immeasurable toll on their families, friends, educators and our communities. We thank everyone who participated and we recognize the strength and resiliency of the families and their unwavering resolve to uncover the truth behind the loss of their loved ones,” said NAN Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. “We would also like to thank the jury for these far reaching and insightful recommendations and we expect firm commitments by the federal and provincial governments and appropriate agencies to work with us to develop a process to begin their immediate implementation.”

The Seven Youth Inquest examined the deaths of Jethro Anderson (2000), Curran Strang (2005), Paul Panacheese (2006), Robyn Harper (2007), Reggie Bushie (2007), Kyle Morrissette (2009) and Jordan Wabasse (2011). All seven died while attending high school in Thunder Bay, far away from their families and home First Nation communities.

After hearing from 146 witnesses with 185 exhibits during eight months of proceedings the jury delivered 145 recommendations directed at improving accountability, safety and education outcomes for all NAN students, including:

- funding by the Government of Canada for preschool, elementary and secondary schools in all NAN First Nation communities;
- an assessment to identify education gaps and the creation of a First Nations working group in Thunder Bay to assess the current status of NAN students;
- a federal advocate to monitor government progress towards equity in education outcomes for First Nation youth;

- construction of a student residence at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School beginning April 1, 2017;
- infrastructure funding by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to provide clean drinkable water, adequate and sustainable housing in NAN First Nations.

“The inquest proceedings have been long and difficult for the families of the deceased youth. Each family, like the jury and public, has heard evidence and details about their children’s death. The families believe that the recommendations that the jury has made must be implemented to prevent future similar deaths and so that other families do not have to endure the loss of children like Jethro, Paul, Curran, Robyn, Reggie, Kyle and Jordan. The memory of these youth will live on in the hearts of each of their families but it is hoped that their legacy, following this inquest, will be lasting change that makes Thunder Bay safer for First Nation students and improves access to better education for First Nation youth,” stated Christa Big Canoe, Legal Advocacy Director at Aboriginal Legal Services and one of the lawyers for six of the families.

To ensure the implementation of the recommendations, NAN and Aboriginal Legal Services are calling on the governments of Canada and Ontario to request the Auditor General for Canada and the Auditor General for Ontario to report on the federal and provincial governments’ response to the jury’s recommendations and evaluate the implementation measures that have been taken within two years’ time.

The first phase of the Inquest began on October 5, 2015 with testimony from family members about the circumstances surrounding these deaths. The second phase concluded on April 8 after testimony from expert witnesses who put the students’ experiences into broader context for the jury. The inquest resumed on May 25 for closing statements by all parties and concluded on May 27, 2016.

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