



Office of the Grand Chief Nishnawbe Aski Nation

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100 Back Street, Unit 200 Thunder Bay, ON P7J 1L2
Tel: (807) 623-8228 Fax: (807) 623-7730

June 28, 2016

ORIGINAL BY MAIL

Premier Kathleen Wynne
Legislative Building
Room 281, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z8

Hon. David Zimmer
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Suite 400, 160 Bloor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2E6

Via email premier@ontario.ca

Via Email david.zimmer@ontario.ca

Dear Premier Wynne and Minister Zimmer:

RE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE INQUEST INTO THE DEATHS OF SEVEN FIRST NATION YOUTH

Today, the jury verdict and recommendations were delivered in the inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations youth: Jethro Anderson, Curran Strang, Robyn Harper, Paul Panacheese, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morrisseau and Jordan Wabasse. These seven youths left their remote Reserve communities and travelled to Thunder Bay to attend high school. All seven of these youth died, far from home, while pursuing their educational goals.

As Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, I am writing you with regard to the seven youth that were the subject of this joint inquest, as they all came from NAN communities.

As a reminder, in response to this ongoing senseless loss, NAN, First Nation leaders, and the families of the seven lost youth, called for a joint inquest into their deaths with the goal of determining the cause and manner of death, and to seek recommendations to prevent future tragic loss.

The joint inquest was held in Thunder Bay between October 2015 and June 2016. It was a massive undertaking. The jury heard from nearly 170 witnesses, including family members, current and former First Nations students, education providers, experts, First Nations leadership and government officials. A number of parties were represented, including the youth's families, NAN, and Chiefs of Ontario, the education service providers, Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, Keewatinook Okimakinak, and Matawa Learning Centre, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, the City of Thunder Bay, the Province of Ontario, and the Government of Canada. The facts and systemic issues surrounding these seven deaths were examined in considerable detail. In the end, counsel for the inquest parties submitted a joint slate of 118 recommendations to the jury.

The 145 recommendations delivered by the jury today call for lasting and significant changes to the education system, policing, and the improvement of conditions in Reserve communities aimed at keeping our youth healthy and safe while they pursue a high school education. Ontario fully participated in this inquest, a massive proceeding of significant expense. My community members now seek the government's reassurance that the incredible effort and related expense that went into obtaining the recommendations will be met with swift government action on implementation.

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I am calling upon you and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to seek a Special Assignment by the Auditor General for Ontario in response to these recommendations. According to s. 17 of the *Auditor General's Act*, the Auditor General shall perform such special assignments as may be required by the Assembly, or by a minister of the Crown in right of Ontario.

This audit should begin after 18 months, and be delivered on the second anniversary of this verdict, June 28, 2018. It should track the recommendations directed at the Ontario government, and evaluate the response, if any.

Without commitment to implementation, the recommendations of coroner's juries gather dust and demoralize NAN community members as well as the general public. Governments and public institutions can act on them, but mostly, they do not. And if nothing changes, the financial cost for everyone involved, most importantly, the families who opened themselves to this process in the hopes for change, will have been in vain. On behalf of my communities, I look to you to honour the sacrifice of their families who have laid bare for us their pain of losing a child, and to honour the youth we have lost, by committing to a safer education system for our First Nations youth.

I look forward to hearing of the Government of Ontario's commitment to implementation, and the Auditor General's impending report.

Sincerely,

NISHNAWBE ASKI NATION



Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler

cc. *NAN Chiefs and Tribal Councils*
Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum
Deputy Grand Chief Derek Fox
Hon. Michael Gravelle, Minister of Northern Development and Mines
Hon. Bill Mauro, Minister of Municipal Affairs
Bonnie Lysyk, Auditor General for Ontario
Julian Falconer, Legal Counsel