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

## **NEWS RELEASE**

Thursday March 30, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## NAN WELCOMES CHRT DECISION

**THUNDER BAY, ON:** Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler welcomes yesterday's ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) supporting NAN's submissions for immediate relief, and congratulating NAN's agreements with the Government of Canada on child welfare reform as "carriers of hope".

"I am pleased that the Tribunal has accepted our submissions and supports our collaborative efforts to improve conditions for our First Nation youth and families in our communities," said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler who attended the Tribunal proceedings in Ottawa last week. "The Remoteness Quotient Table is a unique opportunity to build a long-term relationship with our federal Treaty partner. We are encouraged that the Tribunal accepts our work as a suitable way forward to bring much needed equity for child welfare funding in our communities".

Following a March 22-24, 2017 compliance hearing, yesterday's decision acknowledged the pain caused by the loss of children to suicide and supported NAN's agreements with Indigenous Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) on two immediate relief orders concerning: (1) a Remoteness Quotient Table; and, (2) a Choose Life working group.

Prior to the loss of two 12-year-old children in Wapekeka First Nation to suicide in January 2017, the community had filed a proposal in July 2016 to Health Canada for a community based mental health team, which was left unaddressed. The Tribunal noted that Health Canada acknowledged receipt of the proposal in September 2016, and that Health Canada, claimed that the proposal came at an "awkward time" in the federal funding cycle.

Commenting on Health Canada's response, the Tribunal stated: "The Panel acknowledges how inappropriate this response is in such circumstances and the additional suffering it must have caused".

Further, the Tribunal stated, with emphasis: "The Panel would like to acknowledge and extend our condolences to the families and communities of these youths and to all those who have lost children in similar circumstances."

The Tribunal also noted that the Executive Director of the Office of Primary Health Care within Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, "had no response to as to why the Wapekeka proposal was left unanswered", and that the Executive Director acknowledged that the gap in mental health services "Could rightly be considered a Jordan's Principle case".

Health Canada has committed to establish a Choose Life Working Group with NAN aimed at creating a concrete, simplified process for communities to apply for Jordan's Principle funding. NAN has proposed to report back to the Tribunal on this working group by September 6, 2017. In granting NAN's request, the Tribunal stated that they are "really encouraged by the Choose Life Working Group initiative."

The Tribunal stated that it is "pleased" by the March 10, 2017 agreement between NAN and INAC to jointly develop and implement a remoteness quotient that would apply to NAN First Nations.