



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs  
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

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## **AMC Women's Council concerned about problematic approach to First Nations children and families**

**Treaty One Territory, June 12, 2019** \_ The Women's Council of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs is disappointed with the federal government and the Province of Manitoba in pursuing Bill C-92 *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*.

Today, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples met for the second reading of the pan-Indigenous Bill C-92. Third reading begins tomorrow. The AMC has been committed to advancing the existing child welfare MOU resulting in the drafting of Manitoba-specific federal legislation "Bringing Our Children Home Act (BOCHA)." The federal government has not honoured its commitment to the MOU or to legislate BOCHA at this time, and the AMC has since requested for First Nations in Manitoba to be exempt from Bill C-92. Yesterday, the AMC became aware that the Minister's office of the Department of Indigenous Services Canada would not exclude them because the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) "strongly supported" the bill. Today, the SCO issued a press release titled, "Southern Manitoba First Nations Vote to seize Control of Child Welfare" which raised concern with the AMC Women's Council.

Swan Lake First Nation Chief Francine Meeches, chair of the AMC Women's Council said: "A fundamental change must take place with the existing provincial CFS system. There are numerous problems with Bill C-92, as it maintains the status quo. Bill C-92 should not go through just because it is a federal promise. First Nations children should not be used as a federal Liberal Party ploy to gain votes."

Pine Creek First Nation Chief Karen Batson, member of the AMC Women's Council continued: "Drafted by and for First Nations in Manitoba, the BOCHA takes a unique approach that does not rely on the existing colonial provincial and federal legislative structures. Excluding First Nations in Manitoba in Bill C-92 is the right thing to do. It would respect our MOU with Canada, and recognize that we need a distinct and customized approach to respond to the ongoing First Nation CFS humanitarian crisis."

Manitoba has the highest number of First Nations children in care: the total number of children in care is 11,237; and of those, 8,882 (79 percent) are First Nation. A main reason why there is a high number of First Nations children in the current provincial CFS system is because the province incentivizes First Nations children, and takes away their children's special allowance. In the 2017-18 fiscal year, the province of Manitoba recovered over \$39 million dollars. This is in addition to the \$12 million received directly from Canada.

The SCO is currently seeking to restructure the provincial Southern First Nations Network of Care (Southern Authority). The SCO is provincially mandated by *The Child and Family Services Authorities Act* to appoint Board Members to the Southern Authority; however, the Southern Authority is created by Manitoba legislation and is ultimately accountable to the Minister of Families, not to First Nations. This further entrenches the provincial system. The SCO has also fully supported the province of Manitoba's child welfare reform. However, the child welfare reforms in block funding have already resulted in dramatic detrimental effects on First Nation families.

Poplar River First Nation Chief Vera Mitchell, member of the AMC Women's Council stated, "It is sad that the SCO continues to support the current interests of the government of Manitoba. The advice that SCO is receiving from former high level provincial bureaucrats continues to carry out colonial laws, regulations and practices on our First Nations. This is especially disturbing because the AMC Women's Council met with Indigenous Services Canada Minister Seamus O'Regan on April 25, 2019 in Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. We were all very clear that the AMC Women's Council opposed Bill C-92, and this position has not changed."

The AMC represents 62 out of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba. In April 2017, the AMC Chiefs-in-Assembly mandated the AMC Women's Council to oversee child and family matters. The AMC Chiefs-in-Assembly passed a resolution in October 2018 to advance the *Bringing Our Children Home Act*. The BOCHA is to restore First Nations jurisdictions by superseding any provincial legislation. The BOCHA is the latest in a long list of activities over the years that the AMC through the First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO) has focused on dismantling the current provincial CFS system and reuniting First Nation families. These activities include visiting 55 First Nations, holding numerous town hall meetings, involving First Nations Elders, Knowledge Keepers, citizens and leadership. Altogether, the FNFAO supported 1,158 First Nations children in reunification, kinship placement, avoiding apprehension/birth alerts and with custody and guardianships files.

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### ***About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs***

*The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 per cent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene and Dakota people and traditions.*

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