



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC challenges the approach of the Winnipeg Police Department in suspicious death of Sandy Bay First Nation citizen Jaeda Vanderwal

Treaty One Territory, Winnipeg, Manitoba - Grand Chief Arlen Dumas of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) decries the approach of the Winnipeg Police Department in the suspicious death of 22 year-old Jaeda Vanderwal, and calls on Winnipeg Police Chief Danny Smyth to intervene and direct his officers to properly investigate.

Jaeda's unclothed body was discovered on January 5, 2020, in a train yard located on Higgins Avenue by the Louise Bridge in Winnipeg. She was brought to a hospital where she died of severe complications shortly upon arrival. The cause of death was attributed to hypothermia despite evidence that points to physical and sexual trauma.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, "This is a tragic case that is reminiscent of the death of Tina Fontaine in 2014. It is absolutely reprehensible how First Nations women and girls continue to be mistreated and dismissed. The Chiefs of Manitoba through the AMC's recommendations to the the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls proposed ways for Canada, Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg Police Department to change. Sadly, this has not happened. If our recommendations would have been followed, the approach to Jaeda's investigation would have been different. Her family was dismissed by the police department and they were directed to talk to the Province of Manitoba's Victim Services. Why was this handled in this manner? The family and AMC First Nations Advocate Office tried to provide the police additional information, but were also told to go to the Province of Manitoba's Victim Services. If she was not First Nation, would Winnipeg Police Chief Danny Smyth support his staff to direct them away from investigating?"

Cora Morgan, the First Nations Family Advocate stated, "the family had questions and additional information for the Winnipeg Police Department. However, the police told them they would not accept it. As Jaeda's death was not deemed criminal, the Winnipeg Police directed them to the Province of Manitoba Victim Services and said there would be no further investigation. Despite numerous calls made to Winnipeg Police, the family has not received one phone call from police since they were notified of Jaeda's passing."

Despite the response from the Winnipeg Police, the AMC does not agree that its requirement to investigate should be shuffled off to the Province of Manitoba's Victim Services. Grand Chief Dumas said, "The Winnipeg Police cannot forego its responsibility to investigate into a suspicious death of a First Nation woman or girl. With the recent Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, this is absolutely unacceptable. The AMC, through the FNFAO, has provided support to the Vanderwal family and others, including those that are involved in the current provincial child and family services system. We are here to respond through advocacy on behalf of First Nations citizens since it is proven time and again that the Winnipeg Police do not respond to."

Cora Morgan added, "People tend to be afraid to share information with authorities as there is no trust." The First Nations Family Advocate offers a safe place for clients to share and be heard, and they are mandated by Chiefs-in-Assembly to ensure that First Nations families are treated equitably and fairly in systems and institutions. From our First Nations and community contacts, and social media we have already had additional information that the Winnipeg Police should be working with in an active investigation, not Victim Services."

Grand Chief Dumas concluded, "I want to acknowledge the family of Jaeda Vanderwal. Unfortunately, in addition to dealing with their loss, as many have before them, they have to fight and demand the Winnipeg Police are more thorough in their investigations. The AMC fully supports the families seeking justice and truth into Jaeda's death. First Nations must have an approach to the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls for First Nations in Manitoba, which all levels of governments and police agencies must respect. I hope the Winnipeg Chief of Police, and others, work with the AMC to ensure such a response that the Vanderwal family has experienced never happens again."

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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 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Ininew (Cree), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.