



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 16, 2020

AMC expresses serious concerns regarding the unfair treatment of youth in the Manitoba Justice System during the COVID-19 pandemic

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba - The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) is expressing grave concerns regarding the unlawful treatment of youth in the justice system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Solitary confinement of youth in the Manitoba Remand Centre is harsh and disproportionate punishment for children,” said AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas. “As part of the province’s COVID-19 mitigation measures, the Manitoba Remand Centre is being used to hold youth ages 12-18 in isolation prior to being transferred to the Manitoba Youth Centre; can you imagine placing a 12 year old child in an adult facility?”

When youth are eventually placed in the Manitoba Youth Centre, they continue to be mistreated. First Nations youth make up the vast majority of youth inmates. Manitoba leads the country in the incarceration of First Nations youth. As it was prior to COVID-19, there were serious concerns with how children were being treated within the Manitoba Youth Centre, with the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth (MACY) reporting on the use of pepper spray in confined spaces and lengthy stays in solitary confinement. This is an added low to the way children are treated.

Many youth who are locked up in the Manitoba Youth Centre are there due to summary convictions, breaches of probation or conditions, shoplifting to survive, or youth-in-care who were kicked out of group homes. In the scheme of a global pandemic, the resolve should not be for them to be locked up 23 hours a day in an adult jail.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs can anticipate that this practice is likely earmarked for First Nations children, as they are grossly and disproportionately represented in the Manitoba Child Welfare system as well as in the Manitoba Youth Centre and Agassiz Youth Centre in Portage La Prairie.

Grand Chief Dumas concluded, “It’s almost as though there’s no end to the cruelty directed to our children by the Manitoba legal system. The province of Manitoba should exercise First Nation principles of restorative justice as one measure for reducing the rates of First Nations youth incarceration. This should be the mechanism for any youth coming into conflict with the law during COVID-19. Restorative justice is a far more effective and humane way to address crime. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs urges the province of Manitoba to seek alternative approaches to solitary confinement for First Nation youth in custody during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.”

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For more information, please contact:

Curtis Mallett, Policy Analyst
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Email: cmallette@manitobachiefs.com

Phone: 204-987-4107

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 / Inineu (Cree), Anishinineu (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.