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The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs calls on Premier Pallister to stop Manitoba's divide and conquer tactics in child welfare reform

TREATY ONE TERRITORY _ The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) remains resolute that First Nations must lead child welfare reform in Manitoba, and calls on Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister to ensure Manitoba Minister of Families Scott Fielding respects First Nations jurisdiction and stops his continued divisive and unilateral approach to child welfare reform.

This reaffirmation is made on the occasion of comments last week by the federal government that the current child welfare system in Canada is a “humanitarian crisis” and its concern over the government of Manitoba's plans to reform its First Nations child welfare system. It is also made on the heels of the government of Manitoba's first meeting with its Child Welfare Review Committee.

“Premier Pallister committed to me that Manitoba will work together with the AMC on a number of issues including CFS reform, consistent with the province's approach to reconciliation,” Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said.

Grand Chief continued “We told Minister Fielding exactly what we want, as First Nations grassroots citizens and Manitoba Chiefs' positions are the same: take back jurisdiction of our children and enhance and support First Nations' capacity in all areas. While Minister Fielding has said he is open to hearing what we have to say, he did not invite the AMC to participate on his legislative review committee. This is despite the fact the AMC is willing to work with Manitoba, and requested twice to assist in drafting or re-writing the CFS legislation.”

This position is consistent with the December 19, 2017 resolution of the AMC Executive Council of Chiefs. It includes opposing the Province of Manitoba's *Child Welfare System Reform* and its promotion of permanent guardianship of First Nations children and of Social Impact Bonds. The AMC resolution also demands that the Province of Manitoba cease any further unilateral actions that purport to reform the Manitoba Child and Family Services system. Once again, the AMC leadership was unified in its call for a complete overhaul of the current system that was built on colonial policies and practices that have failed our children and families for decades.

Grand Chief Arlen Dumas stated “the Chiefs-in-Assembly has been clear: First Nations must assert their inherent jurisdiction over our children and families caught in the current CFS system. First Nations must completely reform the system, and have the Province of Manitoba be accountable to First Nations in the area of child and family services. The leadership has directed me to take all necessary steps to prevent the unilateral reform of Manitoba's child welfare system by the province.”

Last December, a Memorandum of Understanding was presented to the AMC Chiefs-in-Assembly, signed between the AMC and Government of Canada and endorsed by the AMC Executive Council of Chiefs. It begins discussions between the AMC and Canada on Manitoba First Nations' inherent jurisdiction over the well-being of First Nations families and children and reform of the federal First Nations Child and Family Services Program. As part of this MOU, the Province of Manitoba will be invited to participate in discussions regarding issues and at times and on terms as agreed by the AMC and the Government of Canada.

Grand Chief Dumas concluded: "The legislation reform is an on-going contentious issue, but it doesn't have to be. We know what our children and families need, so let us get the work done and bring our children home. I look forward to Premier Pallister ensuring his Minister works with the AMC to get this done."

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 represents 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.