



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS



The Provincial Court of Manitoba

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 17th, 2020

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas and Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe jointly announce the collaborative commencement of the re-opening of circuit courts while respecting First Nations' safety measures

In collaboration with First Nations leadership, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), the Provincial Court of Manitoba and Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe jointly announce the safe and steady commencement of the re-opening of circuit courts on First Nation reserve lands.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved this past spring, the circuit court system, which sees members of the Provincial Court of Manitoba travel to many First Nations communities to preside over hearings, ceased functions in order to align with public health orders and out of respect to the First Nation initiation of community closures to outside visitors to protect their citizens.

Following consultation with First Nations, it was announced that circuit courts would resume with extreme safety measures in place given the vulnerability of First Nations to the effects of the virus that causes COVID-19. Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe expressed her intention to work with AMC to reach out to First Nations to collaboratively work with First Nation Chiefs in regard to the circuit court system and a safe and moderate approach to resuming court hearings.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, "I continue to applaud our Chiefs for their ongoing vigilance in combating the occurrence and transmission of COVID-19 within our First Nations, while maintaining and making available many of the day-to-day services within public health guidelines and protocol. While safety is always of top priority going into the fall season, we know that there must be a balance struck in providing legal and judicial services in concert with the need of First Nations to continue their mitigation efforts against the global pandemic. I commend all of our leadership, more specifically Chief Wood of St. Theresa Point who resumed the first circuit court sitting since the pandemic began, not only for her collaborative approach to the courts issue, but on her and all Chiefs' determination to keep the novel coronavirus from entering any of our First Nations in Manitoba."

"It was my intention to reach out to Chiefs and speak directly to First Nations leadership to receive feedback on how judges, the court party and court administration could work with First Nations to safely and securely resume the circuit court openings. The safety of all participants, in the First Nations as well as the court party and participants, was paramount in our collaborative work. The attention to detail, the mutual respect and collaborative approach demonstrated between all parties involved was fundamental to proceeding with the openings. I would particularly like to acknowledge the community leadership in St. Theresa Point, who along

with Judge Martin, the court party and court administration have created a model for other circuit court openings,” noted Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe.

“I further applaud Chief Judge Margaret Wiebe and her respectful and diligent approach to working with First Nation leadership amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Her openness to working with AMC and First Nations in an unprecedented time to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved is appreciated and a testament to the relationship that she has established with the First Nations leadership in Manitoba. Our Chiefs have worked hard to ensure that our First Nations territories in Manitoba are one of the few regions of that country that have not been affected by COVID-19. I expect that this will continue to be the case with the re-opening of the circuit court,” concluded AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas.

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

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