



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMC calls on the Minister of Families to honour policy for ending birth alerts for First Nations moms

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba - The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) is calling on the Province of Manitoba to honour its commitment to address the unfair treatment and human rights violations that impact First Nations mothers and families faced with a Birth Alert and/or newborn apprehension. Despite the theoretical end of the practice of 'birth alerts' in Manitoba, First Nations expectant Mothers continue to experience the apprehension of their newborn babies.

In July 2020, the former Minister of Families announced that the Province of Manitoba would no longer issue birth alerts, a policy implemented by the Child and Family Services (CFS) system to 'alert' hospitals and other CFS Agencies of a mother deemed to be "high-risk" and in need of further assessment before they can be discharged with a newborn baby.

Grand Chief Arlen Dumas states, "The Province of Manitoba has repeatedly made statements about reconciliation with First Nations peoples, identifying prevention as key to supporting their families involved in the CFS system; but their actions with respect to newborn apprehension make those words ring hollow. This provincial Conservative government continues to make unilateral and unfounded determinations about what is in the best interest of First Nations families. These determinations result in the continuation of birth alerts, with social workers and law enforcement continuing to rip children away from their mothers at birth. With the next Premier being announced this weekend, it will be an opportunity for the new leader to restart the relationship with First Nations and the province of Manitoba."

"An Elder once told me that when a child is born the umbilical cord should only be cut once. But each time a CFS agency comes to apprehend a child, that umbilical cord is cut again, and again. We know that the current CFS system does not work for us, as it's based on a colonial framework that does not operate in the best interest of First Nations children and families. Through the First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO), we continue to witness the rampant effects of newborn apprehensions, with at least one phone-call a week from First Nations expectant mothers who are faced with an overwhelming fear of their baby being taken at birth," stated Cora Morgan, First Nation Family Advocate.

"As a starting point, we at the FNFAO strive to create a safe space where moms can feel supported and free from judgement. The FNFAO prioritizes keeping Mom and baby together. As a second and third option, we will advocate for baby to be placed with family and within the First Nation," continued Cora Morgan, First Nations Family Advocate.

"Reform of CFS has been included in the government's commitment to reconciliation. Sadly, however, ending the practice of birth alerts has proven to be a falsity. We need to move away from colonial policies and legislations that prescribe how to support children and families. First Nations know the issues firsthand and have the solutions to lead and create meaningful change. We are hopeful with the next leader of the Conservative government and the next Premier of Manitoba, we will have a provincial government that is more willing to support First Nations in taking the lead in addressing the issues and challenges and barriers governments have caused and that affect First Nations families. We will do this by implementing our own laws, based on traditional concepts and child-rearing principles," concluded Grand Chief 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), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.