



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS



ABINOOJYAG BIGHIWEWAG
First Nations
Family Advocate Office
"Bringing Our Children Home"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 6, 2022

THE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA CHIEFS (AMC)- FIRST NATIONS FAMILY ADVOCATE OFFICE FILES CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT ON BEHALF OF FIRST NATIONS CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND NATIONS IMPACTED BY THE MANITOBA CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC)- First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO) on behalf of First Nations children, their families and First Nations, filed a class action lawsuit to the Court of King’s Bench against the Government of Manitoba and the Attorney General of Canada. This legal action would be the first specific to “off-reserve” children, going back from 1992 to present day, who were apprehended by Child and Family Services (CFS) and placed into foster care.

There are approximately 11,000 children in the child welfare system in Manitoba, 80 percent of whom are First Nations and many of those children are apprehended off-reserve (61% of the children in care in the Northern Authority and 75% of the children in care of the Southern Authority were apprehended off-reserve.)

The legal action outlines how the failure of the child welfare system in Manitoba has principally affected three groups: the children themselves, their families, and their First Nations. All three groups must be represented in order to advance restorative justice and ensure that the tragic errors of the past are not repeated.

The plaintiffs seek the following:

- 1) an immediate stop to the discriminatory practices that result in the apprehension of so many First Nations children
- 2) properly funded services for First Nations children now
- 3) \$1 billion dollars in compensation to First Nations children, families and First Nations for the damage caused by the child welfare system since 1992
- 4) recognition that the wellbeing of First Nation children must be entrenched in First Nations laws relating to the wellbeing of First Nations children and families.

“As our class action clearly states: Manitoba and Canada’s disastrous management of child welfare in this province perpetuates a longstanding effort to assimilate First Nations children,” stated AMC Deputy Grand Chief Cornell McLean. “In the guise of providing care, Manitoba and Canada have employed discriminatory practices to destroy First Nations families and Nations. This action seeks to end the harm, together with compensation to help us heal as a Nation.”

For decades, children in the foster care system have been prevented from learning their First Nation’s distinct and



sacred teachings, receiving essential spiritual guidance, and knowing and taking pride in their true identity and culture. This ongoing practice sets up First Nations children to fail as adults, where they are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, unemployment, illness, poor educational outcomes, human trafficking, gang recruitment, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

In 2014, the AMC hosted Open Citizens Forums and heard from former children-in-care, parents, grandparents, workers, and support service organizations who work or had involvement in the CFS system. From these engagements, the AMC developed a report titled “Bringing Our Children Home”. To implement the recommendations in the report, the AMC opened the First Nations Family Advocate Office (FNFAO) on June 1, 2015. The FNFAO supports and advocates for First Nations families involved with the CFS system by challenging existing jurisdictions, policies, laws, and organization using First Nations knowledge, customary laws, traditions, and belief systems to create positive change for children, families, and Nations.

“We have a deep understanding of the trauma inflicted on First Nations people by the ongoing imposition of a colonial child welfare system. It must stop,” stated Cora Morgan, AMC First Nations Family Advocate. “The way forward is clear: Through many engagement sessions with First Nations and the AMC Elders Council, we have developed the First Nation Sovereign Family Laws as templates to empower First Nations to take the lead over their own child and family matters as they see fit. At the heart of this work, relationships and inter-connection are centered. Our traditional governance works through kinship roles and responsibilities. There are no separate government officials or institutions, — just family members living out their roles and responsibilities with one another.”

The First Nation Sovereign Family Template Laws were provided to each of the five Nations/language groups in Manitoba (Anishinaabeg, Anishininwuk, Nehethowuk/Inninwak, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline) to develop their own distinct version.

Legal representation in the class action lawsuit filed today is by Public Interest Law Centre, Legal Aid Manitoba; McCarthy Tétrault LLP (Toronto); Parkland Collaborative Legal Options (Dauphin).

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For more information, please contact:

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs



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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.