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PRESS RELEASE

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DELAYING FUNDING VICTIMIZES FIRST NATION CHILDREN

TORONTO, ONT – The Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) leaders and those who work in child welfare within the Keewatinowi region have long known there was disparity in First Nation Child Welfare funding. The MKO was pleased to see the evidence in the report by Dr. John Loxley, *Development of A New Federal-Provincial Funding Model For First Nations Child and Family Services in Manitoba*, that outlines and confirms the funding shortfalls. Research done by the MKO shows the problems and inequalities are even larger for on-reserve children in care in northern Manitoba.

“There is simply no excuse for further delays. Governments have been underfunding the First Nation CFS system for over \$100 million a year and that is totally unacceptable. Children and their families have been victims of this unfair system for far too long,” Grand Chief Sheila North stated. “We are thankful that these facts are coming to light and that governments have taken some small steps to rectify the shortfalls; however, substantial funding that would bring First Nations’ CFS systems closer to the level of care that Canadian children experience is still just penciled in. In the meantime, First Nation families suffer. In the eyes of a child a year away from parents and their families is a heart-wrenching long time, and the government is actually contributing to negative outcomes,”

The MKO cannot accept any further delays in addressing the horrendous funding shortfalls, which were also brought to light on January 26, 2016 through the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal’s decision regarding the inequality of child services funding on-reserve.

“The Keewatinowi region and northern Manitoba child welfare agencies know and feel the impacts of the shortfall the most. Over 70 per cent of the families that the MKO advocates for live on-reserve and experience the challenges of this inequality first hand. First Nations in the Keewatinowi region must have the same opportunities and support for a successful life as the rest of Canada. This means that an equality of services, resources and infrastructure must be delivered within northern communities to begin to address all the social determinants of health. A healthy and well-supported childhood is the best predictor of a positive and successful adulthood,” Grand Chief North stated.

The shortfalls, jurisdictional issues and the lack of resources and infrastructure are topics that must be addressed at the Emergency Meeting on CFS called in Ottawa by Indigenous Services Minister, Jane Philpott.

"We lift up those who are on the frontlines of the First Nation CFS system. It is a hard job, made worse because they do not have the infrastructure, program funding or tools to help First Nation families stay together. They are forced to remove children just because it is the cheapest way to reduce liability for the government. This is what leads to such uneven statistics when it comes to First Nation children in care," Grand Chief Sheila North said. "We need to sit down and work this out. First Nations know their needs and know what solutions will work best for their families. I look forward to sitting down with Minister Philpott and others to discuss these matters. While an increase in funding is one-step, an increase in local control and capacity enhancement is also needed. Canada is a huge landmass and the solutions in one area may not work in another. Families in the Keewatinowi region must be able to influence the creation and details of an effective CFS system. Families are the building blocks of our First Nations. We will make that clear in the meeting with the Federal and provincial Ministers in Ottawa this week," the Grand Chief concluded.

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~Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 30 First Nation communities in Manitoba's North since 1981~

