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PRESS RELEASE

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MKO Willing to Work on CFS Reform with Canada and Manitoba

OTTAWA, ONT – The Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) and the First Nations it advocates for are willing to consider renewed dialogue with the Manitoban and Canadian governments to support the further progress of the devolution of child and family services. This would include enacting legislative change created with the intent of true devolution in mind. First Nations must be empowered and have jurisdiction over their Child and Family authorities and agencies, so they can keep their children safe within their families, culture and communities. Support for this legislative change and effective fiscal resources must be produced immediately and are paramount to ensure a stable transition.

“We know that child welfare agencies in the north feel the impacts of the funding 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 have to 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 Sheila North stated.

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 report by Dr. John Loxley, development of A New Federal-Provincial Funding Model For First Nations Child and Family Services in Manitoba, confirms that the greatest funding shortfalls are experienced by on-reserve children in care in northern Manitoba. The gap in equal funding for First Nations children in care in northern Manitoba was estimated to be at over \$44 million.

The MKO has recently met with Manitoba’s Minister of Families and reiterated our desire to continue to negotiate with the province to make an effective CFS system to northern families. In 2000, the MKO First Nations entered into a MOU to establish a partnership initiative under a common process to expand off-reserve jurisdiction for First Nations. The MKO would be pleased to revisit the spirit and intent of the MOU with the province to further the devolution process.

MKO is considering the six point plan that Minister Philpot has outlined for CFS reform; however, the First Nations that MKO advocates for insist that positive changes will also have to include:

- First Nations’ families, Elders, leadership and governments will have the jurisdictional power of decision making to lead a culturally competent CFS system;
- The focus of reform must be on healing and prevention;

- The delivery of effective, sustainable and consistent funding, and;
- The capacity of northern First Nations must be enhanced in the areas of human resources and infrastructure.

“Our people are rights holders, which means Canada and Manitoba must recognize the importance of First Nations involvement in the shaping of governance over child and family matters. A system that is not culturally appropriate will not meet the needs of First Nation families in the north. There is nothing in my treaty that says the Canadian government can take away our children. The next step is to work in partnership with Manitoba and Canada to develop a First Nation-led CFS system, with standards and practices that are community based and locally directed. Families are the building blocks of our nations,” Grand Chief Shelia North stated.

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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~

