

Advocate for Children and Youth urges federal action to create equal child welfare funding on reserve, and to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in care

SASKATOON – A landmark ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in the First Nations child welfare case could spark significant changes in how the federal government funds First Nations child welfare and other human services on reserve. Bob Pringle, Saskatchewan’s Acting Advocate for Children and Youth, welcomed the tribunal’s ruling that federal provision of funding for First Nations child and family services on-reserve is discriminatory and inequitable. “This is a very important decision,” he said, “one that provides a rare opening to fix a broken funding system for on-reserve child welfare services. All Saskatchewan children have the right to equitable access to human services of the highest quality.”

As a result of the decision, the Human Rights Tribunal called on the federal government to remove the discriminatory aspects of the funding formulas that are used to pay for child welfare on reserve. It has also recommended the full implementation of Jordan’s Principle, which calls for First Nations children to have the same access to services as other Canadian children – without delays caused by jurisdictional disputes between levels of government or government ministries. There are numerous examples of this in Saskatchewan.

Aboriginal children are starkly over-represented among children in care across Canada. In Saskatchewan, Aboriginal children currently account for about seven in ten children in care, while representing about 27% of the provincial population aged 0 to 14.

Pringle noted that “the Tribunal’s decision also draws our attention to some of the broader social determinants of this over-representation, and the urgent need for First Nations children and their families to have access to quality human services in many areas, including early childhood development, childcare, parenting and foster care supports, mental health services, and trauma-informed child welfare services.”

Pringle applauded the unwavering efforts of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, the Assembly of First Nations and many others to advance this case over the past decade. “It is our understanding that the Federal government will honour this decision, and is committed to moving toward a better future for First Nations children in Canada,” he said. “It is our expectation that timely action will be taken to comply with this decision.”

For many years, inclusive of his *2013 and 2014 Annual Reports*, Pringle has focused on improving outcomes for children and youth, and the need to address the factors that put them at risk – poverty and its related conditions, mental illness, violence, addictions, racism, the legacy of colonialism and residential schools, and disabilities.

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of advocates, investigators and other staff who work on behalf of the province's young people. The Advocate’s vision is that the rights, interests and well-being of children and

youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy, programs and practice.

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