

## **Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth Calls Indigenous Youth Incarceration Rates a Crisis**

SASKATOON– The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Corey O’Soup, urges the government to address the over representation of Indigenous youth in custody.

A recent Statistics Canada report highlighted the staggering findings regarding the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the justice system, and particularly those statistics reflecting the high rates of Indigenous youth in custody. “This is unacceptable and clearly something needs to change,” says O’Soup.

In Saskatchewan 92 percent of male youth admitted into custody and 98 percent of the females are Indigenous. National trends reflect a decrease in over all youth in custody however, the percentage of Indigenous youth in custody continues to rise. In Canada, Indigenous youth account for only eight percent of the total youth population, yet Indigenous youth represent 47 percent of the youth in custody.

“We travel the province and visit our youth in custody facilities, and on any given day this statistic can sadly reflect up to 100 percent, depending on the facility. This is something I witness again and again, but this report provides solid evidence that our Indigenous youth are over-represented. We cannot continue to ignore the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action and must work harder to do better for these young people,” said O’Soup.

“These numbers tell us we are facing a crisis in this province and around the country. Indigenous children in Saskatchewan are more likely to live in poverty, drop out of high school, be incarcerated and die by suicide than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The inequities and injustices Indigenous youth face resulting from the consequences of colonization and residential schools requires that attention be paid at the highest level from the governments, communities and the people of this country,” says O’Soup.

O’Soup points to the importance of investing in our families and communities to ensure our Indigenous youth are provided with quality education, healthcare and mental health supports that start in the early years and continue beyond graduation and into adulthood. Intervention and prevention such as this is what will make the difference. Indigenous justice models that focus on diversion from incarceration and problem solving should also be considered to ensure intervention is culturally embedded at the court process.

The Advocate reiterates the importance of engaging, listening, and supporting Indigenous youth to find solutions that work for them in all aspects of their lives. Asking what kids need to divert them away from the justice system and then supporting them can make a difference. “These young people know what they need to be successful but for most of them, they cannot attain it and the reality is that far too many of these kids are being locked up or dying for reasons that stem from a history that they cannot yet escape.”

The Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. He leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province’s young people. Our vision is that the rights, well-being and voice of children and youth are respected and valued.

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