

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

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First Nations Leadership Council recognizes the cessation of “Birth Alerts” as first step of many to end the traumatizing practice of hospital removals

X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), S^kwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliiwətaʔ/səlilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Territories/Vancouver:

The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) applauds the Ministry of Children and Family Development for their decision and announcement that they will be ending the longstanding practice of “Birth Alerts,” but is clear that this is only the beginning of what is necessary to end the traumatizing practice of hospital removals for First Nations children and families.

“For decades we have seen our children stolen from their families as a direct result of colonial and institutional racism,” said Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “This practice began with the onset of the residential school system in which children were often ripped from their mothers’ arms, and the practice has continued in today’s child welfare and healthcare systems with disproportionately high rates of apprehension at birth. Before a First Nations mother had even given birth, hospital alerts allowed for her to be deemed unfit and for her baby to be removed hours after leaving her womb. Ending this practice is a positive step towards the change that is needed, including the meaningful and timely transition to Indigenous jurisdiction over children and families”.

The practice of birth alerts, also known as hospital alerts, would allow for a flag to be placed on an expectant mother if she was deemed to be “high-risk”. This communication would happen between the child welfare and health authorities, typically without the consent of the mother, placing an alert on her hospital file which would ensure the Ministry be called once she gives birth. This practice has been found to disproportionately affect Indigenous women and has led to the FNLC and others advocating that this practice immediately be stopped.

The National Inquiry on MMIWG further affirmed that this practice disproportionately impacts Indigenous women and demanded it stop, as is reflected in Call for Justice 12.1 which states: “*We call upon provincial and territorial governments and child welfare services for an immediate end to the practice of targeting and apprehending infants (hospital alerts or birth alerts) from Indigenous mothers right after they give birth.*”

Cheryl Casimer, First Nations Summit Task Group, stated, “There must be processes and resources put in place to ensure that First Nations children are not separated from their mothers. This includes prenatal and prevention services, but also post-natal services that are focused on keeping families together. This amended policy will stop the practice of birth-alerts for expectant mothers but does little to address the ongoing systemic and institutional racism that exists for First Nations children and families. Once a mother has given birth there is nothing to stop a report and subsequent removal. The FNLC calls for a cross-ministerial approach to ensuring that all measures are taken to keep newborn infants with their mothers and to ensure that the maternal-child bond is preserved and protected.”



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“We have been advocating for these necessary changes for a long time,” said BCAFN Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “We applaud the Ministry of Children and Family Development for responding to this call and taking the steps necessary to see this practice stopped in BC. We will continue to focus our advocacy on seeing the full implementation and adoption of *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, which places priority on prevention services for our children and families.”

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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