

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Media Release

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First Nations Leadership Council Statement on Connor Sutton and Anti-Indigenous Racism in BC's Health-Care System

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətaʔ/ḥseliłwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.): The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) extends our compassion and support to Connor Sutton, his family, friends, and the T'Sou-ke Nation community. In yet another deplorable and senseless act of anti-Indigenous racism, Connor has been denied respectful care and support for more than a month. His quality of life has been severely impaired by a health-care system that institutionalizes and perpetuates the systemic racism that runs rampant in our country.

Connor Sutton is a 23-year-old Indigenous man who was accepted into the Canadian military through the Indigenous entry program and was serving as a Corporal in his army platoon with excellent standing for four and a half years. After suffering a severe injury, a hole in his esophagus that led to chest pains, vomiting, speech and breathing difficulties, and severe confusion, he sought aid at a hospital in Duncan, BC. Instead of concern, empathy, and care, he was met with callousness and discrimination: the hospital staff refused to help or treat him and told him to go to a homeless shelter before reportedly physically assaulting him. Since then, Connor was admitted into the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria and has been held in the psychiatric ward for the past month without a diagnosis. He has been denied the right to a hearing by a mental panel because the doctor has failed to provide information. Hospital policy states that it will take three months until a new hearing can be set.

"A young man, hurt and confused, walks into a hospital expecting help. He is instantly racially profiled and is viewed as a homeless, intoxicated threat, not worthy of care and respect. Connor's horrendous treatment by hospital staff is not unique in its prevalence and commonality; in the past months we have heard deplorable reports that doctors and emergency room staff across the province played a game in which they would "guess" the blood-alcohol levels of Indigenous patients," stated Robert Phillips of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. "What happened to these Indigenous patients and what happened to Connor is unacceptable and proof that the institutions and structures governing our society are still perpetuating colonial and racist values that oppress and damage Indigenous lives."

"The mistreatment of Connor Sutton follows on the heels of the announcement of an independent investigation, led by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, into the range and extent of anti-Indigenous racism in BC's health-care system. Connor's case must be included in this thorough investigation; racism was at the heart of the negligent care he received," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. "Connor was denied immediate medical attention and despite there being no evidence he physically assaulted anyone, had his human and Indigenous-rights abused when he entered into that hospital. Connor deserves justice and he needs immediate support in obtaining a hearing as expeditiously as possible."

"For Connor to be involuntarily held in the psych ward with the immense physical, emotional, and mental trauma he is experiencing, and with there being no proper diagnosis of his condition, is cruel and appalling. Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond needs to be involved in Connor's case so as to not only inform her current investigation, but so she can provide the legal support and insight Connor needs," stated Chief Don Tom, Vice President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "The FNLC not only calls upon the



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relevant health authorities and service providers to have a strong framework in place for addressing and eradicating any anti-Indigenous racism or discriminatory conduct, but for the Canadian Armed Forces, of which Connor belongs to and serves, to hold themselves accountable and intervene when one of their own is involved in or impacted by anti-Indigenous racism.”

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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