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Southern Chiefs' Organization Issues Directive to Implement Reading of Parents' Bill of Rights by Social Workers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 20, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — An innovative Directive was issued today to the Southern First Nations Network of Care by the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) to ensure that the rights of First Nation parents coming into contact with child welfare are prioritized and communicated.

The SCO Chiefs' Standing Committee on Child Welfare issued a Directive to the Southern First Nations Network of Care that requires their child and family service workers to verbally inform First Nation parents of their rights in relation to their children when workers attend to child protection matters. Issuing this Directive will ensure that parents are aware of their rights, and will empower them to assert their rights when working with an agency.

"Many southern First Nation parents do not know their rights when dealing with Child and Family Services," said Grand Chief Jerry Daniels of the Southern Chief's Organization. "With today's Directive, we are confident that fewer children will be apprehended and that family placements will be prioritized so that children will remain closer to their cultural and community ties. This will ensure that southern First Nation children will have better outcomes."

Chief Deborah Smith of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and Chair of the SCO Chiefs committee on child welfare said, "this Directive is a very positive step for our southern First Nation families. Making it mandatory for social workers to read the Bill of Rights to parents is akin to police reading rights to an individual upon arrest. I believe that we will see positive impacts from this Directive for years to come. Everyone must be made aware of their rights for positive change to occur."

To date, there are more than 11,000 children in care in Manitoba, 90% of whom are Indigenous, and more than half of all children in care in the province are members of southern First Nations. Parents in many cases are unaware of their rights when dealing

with CFS—knowing their rights will enable parents to begin to assert their rights when navigating an intimidating child welfare system.

Dakota Plains Vice-Chief Donny Smoke stated, “many parents are overwhelmed with fear when approached by child welfare workers. They do not realize that they have choices and can provide input into the care of their children. This Directive will ensure that families stay connected whenever possible.”

The Southern Chiefs’ Organization continues to make substantive changes to the child welfare system in Manitoba to support the preservation of southern First Nation families who are or may be receiving services.

In addition to today’s Directive, the SCO Chiefs have recently issued two recent Directives to the Southern First Nations Network of Care to institute a culturally appropriate and safe alternative to the practice of birth alerts in Manitoba, as well as requiring a culturally appropriate alternative to foster parent appeals with timelines attached.

Southern First Nation parents who are dealing with child welfare matters are welcome to contact the CFS System Navigator at the Southern Chiefs’ Organization for guidance and assistance at 204-946-1869 or by email to Candace.Campbell@scoinc.mb.ca.

The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations that came together in 1999 to protect, preserve, promote, and enhance First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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PARENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS IN RELATION TO CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

- To identify a safe person to care for your child(ren).
- To bring in your own supports when meeting with Child and Family Services.
- To receive services focused on early intervention and prevention of apprehension.
- To receive culturally appropriate services and resources.
- To receive help and resources to support family preservations, as long as there are no immediate risks to the safety of your child(ren).
- To attend court proceedings regarding your child(ren) and to provide input to the judge.
- To provide input into your case plan and receive notification prior to significant action.

Each situation is different. Stay calm, use your common sense, remember everything that happens, and remember your rights.

FOR HELP, PLEASE CALL OUR CFS SYSTEM NAVIGATOR AT 204-946-1869.

Waakaabit: Working within the circle to make good decisions for our children, families, and community.



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