



Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4 www.scoinc.mb.ca
Phone: (204) 946-1869 Fax: (204) 946-1871 Toll Free: 1-866-876-9701

No Collaboration, No Communication, No Change in Manitoba's approach to the Birth Alert Policy, But it will not apply to southern First Nations

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) Grand Chief Jerry Daniels is not surprised at Manitoba Families Minister Heather Stephanson's announcement that there will be a delay in ending the controversial Birth Alert practice.

SCO predicted that the province had no real intention of eliminating the Birth Alert practice, but rather was merely working on renaming the policy and implementing equally stringent requirements to the field. "Today, I stand with our southern First Nation CFS service providers as we turn the page and begin to implement a culturally-appropriate alternative to Manitoba's Birth Alert practice, beginning on April 1, 2020," said Grand Chief Daniels.

SCO Chiefs' Child and Family Services Committee Co-Chair, Chief Cornell McLean of Lake Manitoba First Nation, also expressed his opposition to the Manitoba government's unilateral policy decisions. "This policy is cloaked in the Province's bias against First Nations families and a practice of taking children first and asking questions later," said McLean. "The province must realize that First Nation peoples have the capacity to implement our own solutions, and that the province's paternalistic meddling only serves to create obstacles for children and families that legitimately need support from our community service providers."

In September of 2019, the SCO Chiefs-in-Summit issued a Directive to the Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFNNC) to develop a culturally-appropriate and safe alternative to Manitoba's Birth Alert practice. "The southern First Nation CFS system has complied with the Chief's Directive by creating a policy to support the well-being of our membership and keep families intact whenever possible," said McLean.

SCO and the SFNNC, in partnership with its mandated CFS agencies, will continue to implement solutions that focus on safety, resilience, and jurisdiction of First Nation children and families.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nation 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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For Media Inquiries:

Vic Savino, Communications Officer, Southern Chiefs' Organization

Winnipeg Sub-Office: (204) 946-1869 | Email: Vic.Savino@scoinc.mb.ca