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End of Birth Alerts a Welcome Beginning Manitoba follows lead of southern First Nations

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Effective July 1, 2020, birth alerts will no longer be issued by the Province of Manitoba. Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) Grand Chief Jerry Daniels says this announcement is a welcome beginning, after years of advocating.

“SCO welcomes the end of a destructive and harmful policy that took babies from the arms of their mothers in the hospital,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. Daniels added, “When Indigenous women and families are supported in their healing and ability to parent, outcomes for the most vulnerable children in Manitoba are guaranteed to improve over time.”

SCO took steps to eliminate the birth alert policy at the Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFFNC) and to replace it with a culturally appropriate and safe alternative, and Manitoba has now followed our lead.

In September of 2019, the SCO Chiefs-in-Summit issued a Directive to the SFNNC to develop a culturally appropriate and safe alternative to Manitoba's birth alert practice. The provincial government had indicated it would work with child welfare agencies to end the practice of birth alerts in Manitoba, but declined to institute this change near the end of March 2020, citing the COVID-19 pandemic.

On April 1, 2020, SFNNC issued a Directive in keeping with the vision of Southern First Nations leadership, instituting an end to the practice of issuing birth alerts. SFNNC committed to working with child welfare agencies to implement a differential response using safety and access plans, connect parents with community resources where available, and improve outcomes for vulnerable Indigenous mothers and their infants.

This Directive, entitled, “*First Nation Expectant Mother Preventative Care Practices*”, requires all SFNNC-mandated child welfare agencies to adhere to the three principles laid out in *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Children: Best Interest of the Child, Cultural Continuity, and Substantive Equality*, when providing services to Indigenous families.

SCO has long advocated for Indigenous families to be provided with the supports and services they need to stay safe as a family unit—instead of apprehensions that result in children being placed into care. When apprehensions occur, money is spent on child maintenance fees and respite, instead of being spent on programs, services, and supports that would prevent those children from being taken into care in the first place.

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 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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