



OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE

101 - 3535 Old Okanagan Hwy, Westbank, BC V4T 3L7
Phone 250-707-0095 Toll Free 1-866-662-9609 Fax 250-707-0166 www.sylx.org

September 28, 2022

Honorable Murray Rankin, Interim Attorney General
Office of the Attorney General
Room 232, Parliament Buildings
PO Box 9044 Stn Prov. Govt.
AG.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honorable Mitzi Dean
Minister of Children/Family Development
PO Box 9057 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2
MCF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honorable Murray Rankin
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
PO Box 9051 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
IRR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

RE: Public Inquiry into the Ministry of Children and Family Services following the Fraud and Thefts of Robert R. Saunders

We are writing this letter on behalf of the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Chief's Executive Council (CEC) in regards to Child Protection and Resource worker Robert Riley Saunders (Saunders). Saunders had spent over a decade stealing support services funding from mostly indigenous youth in foster care with the use of a falsified Social Work degree. This travesty and other tragic cases where young children and youth have lost their lives proves that there is a serious gap and complete lack of oversight of MCFD workers.

During Saunders time as a delegated social worker (SW), the Ministry of Children and Family Development's (MCFD) work culture excluded Saunders from accountability and oversight. MCFD workers, Team Leads, and managers refused to listen to numerous complaints regarding Saunders' conduct by his own clients, Indigenous Band workers and community members. This corrupt work culture became the breeding ground for Saunders to steal just under half a million dollars from youth who were on his caseload, defrauding them of their food, clothing, services and shelter allowances, leaving many of them destitute, homeless and struggling to survive.

On July 25th 2022, Saunders plead guilty to 3 out of 13 charges and received a punishment of five years for fraud, two years for breach of trust, which will be served concurrently, and one month for forgery. In July 2022, the *Sylx* Okanagan Nation Chiefs' Executive signed Tribal Council Resolution (TRC) 491, supporting Council demands for a public inquiry into the corrupt practice, actions and the policies of MCFD during the period Saunders worked on behalf of the Director.



Since the inception of MCFD in 1996, MCFD has had constant and specific oversight from the Children's Commissioner, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Child and Youth Officer and more recently after the Gove Report, the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY). Presently, the Ministry continues to face challenges as those described 27 years ago in the Gove Report and 16 years ago in the Hughes Report, yet the government continues to fail to put recommendations directed toward MCFD into practice to protect our most vulnerable population. The government's failure to carry out thousands of recommendations over the lifetime of MCFD, is resulting in harms too numerous to mention, deaths and devastation.

Presently, there is another hole in the MCFD safety net. An internal MCFD management deficit and possible staff corruption permitted Saunders unbridled ability to defraud children and youth for over 10 years. There was a responsibility for the Director of MCFD to oversee Saunders actions as a BC Public Service employee, and as Director's under the Child Family and Community Services Act, (CFCSA) but that did not occur. See Appendix A.

As stated in the Okanagan Nation's axá i? scuntat i? tl ʔaʔxitat ʔl i? nqstət | Family Declaration, "it is our inherent right, that we are the ones to say what governs us, for what are the best interests, the good health, and the well-being of our children and people". While these criminal acts occurred on our territory, we know this is not an isolated incident. Our Declaration is a reminder of our responsibility to care for those within our territory and a reminder to the Government of their responsibilities to act in good faith.

We are demanding a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the fraud and theft that Saunders was able to commit, a comprehensive critical MCFD review and recommendations for change to ensure undetected internal MCFD fraud does not continue to harm children and youth. We want to ensure that any and all recommendations that result from this public inquiry and comprehensive critical provincial review are implemented with the resources required to ensure long-lasting and meaningful systemic changes to the child welfare system in BC, to increase safety, and to fulfill their obligations to reconciliation with First Nations and all Indigenous guests within the province.

Please contact ONA Executive Director, Pauline Terbasket via email at Director@syilx.org or by telephone at 250-707-0095 ext. 214 to arrange our next steps forward together.

Sincerely,

OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE



Ki law na-Ylmixwm Clarence Louie
xaʔtus, Tribal Chair



Sil-teekin yilmixwm Greg Gabriel
Syilx Nation Child and Family Rep

OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE

101 - 3535 Old Okanagan Hwy, Westbank, BC V4T 3L7 Phone 250-707-0095 Toll Free 1-866-662-9609 Fax 250-707-0166 www.syilx.org

Appendix A

According to Court Documents, the Director:

The Director failed to adequately supervise, restrict, review and restrain Saunders. The Director failed to implement adequate systems, restraints and controls to detect and prevent Saunders' misappropriation of funds and benefits. The Director failed to conduct reviews of Saunders' files to detect whether Saunders was carrying out his duties appropriately and in accordance with the best interests of children, youth and families under his care. The Director delegated parental control to Saunders.

Saunders' team lead did not hold the weekly and monthly consultation with Saunders as required by policy and/or failed to ascertain whether the children assigned to Saunders received appropriate care and failed to ascertain their level of well-being. As well, a manager did not properly supervise Saunders' team lead, the Executive Director (ED) did not properly supervise the manager, and the supervisors in Victoria did not properly supervise the ED.

The Director was aware of previous instances of Saunders' misconduct but failed to implement adequate supervision and controls that would have detected Saunders' misconduct in a timely fashion. The Director's failure to detect, supervise, restrict, review and restrain Saunders has resulted in harm to the many Indigenous youth and their families.

The Director failed to move expeditiously to review and restrain Saunders and failed to advise the Plaintiff in a timely fashion or notify the class members once Fraud was detected.