



NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bill 79: To ensure that justice is served for our children and families

Wendake, April 1, 2021 – Inspired by the motivation to ensure justice for First Nations and Inuit families who have lost a child in a Quebec institution, the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) are presenting a joint brief on Bill 79 to the National Assembly of Québec.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG) brought to light the treatment to which these First Nations families suffering from the disappearance or death of children have been subjected.

The AFNQL and the FNQLHSSC have emphasized the inhumane nature of the treatment to which the children and families of our nations have been subjected as well as the denial by Quebec institutions of their fundamental right to the truth.

Let us also remember the government's approach, in the fall of 2019, when it tried to respond to the NIMMIWG's Call for Justice no. 20 by quickly incorporating six amendments aimed at the "communication of personal information to families of missing or deceased Indigenous children" in a bill whose object was quite different, completely unrelated, all without consulting the main stakeholders or offering them the opportunity to testify publicly.

On December 9, 2020, the Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs, Ian Lafrenière, introduced Bill 79, *An Act to authorize the communication of personal information to the families of Indigenous children who went missing or died after being admitted to an institution*. This Bill aims to support families in their search for information.

The AFNQL and the FNQLHSSC are uniting their voices with those of family representatives to argue that the objective of the bill is too restrictive and does not allow the fundamental right to the truth, fostering true healing, to be exercised.

"These are serious matters that prove the flagrant lack of sensitivity of Quebec institutions towards our peoples, particularly when one considers the barriers, such as cultural and linguistic ones, that families wishing to hire a lawyer may face. This speaks volume on the systemic discrimination and racism towards Quebec First Nations and Inuit

resulting from of an archaic institutional framework inherited from colonialism,” said Derek Montour, President of the FNQLHSSC Board of Directors.

In a general sense, the two organizations salute the Government of Quebec’s desire to support families who have experienced such a tragedy and to alleviate their suffering. On the other hand, certain aspects of the bill should be reconsidered in order to better support families who wish to initiate research. The AFNQL and the FNQLHSSC particularly recommend the following:

- That the five-year limitation period be repealed for making a disclosure of information request.
- That the period covered by a request for access to personal information be extended from 1940, instead of 1950, to present day, rather than ending in 1989. There are indications that there may have been admissions prior to 1940.
- That families, in addition to being allowed to obtain information on the circumstances surrounding the disappearance or death of their children, also be allowed to obtain information on the underlying causes.
- That families be allowed to file a complaint in their language of origin and have access to interpreters.
- That the Government of Quebec clarify the measures to support families, undertake to provide services requested by families (e.g., psychosocial services) and guarantee financial support to assist families in their research.

“Even if I consider it inconceivable that our families are required to comply with a framework that is totally foreign to them in order to gain access to justice and dignity, we are committed to supporting them. The government must do the same and, above all, be humane and allow them to get the answers to which they are entitled. For once, the law must adapt to our realities rather than the other way around,” stated AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard.

To read the brief, [click here](#) (French only). Please note that the English version will be available at a later time.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is the political organization that brings together 43 Chiefs of the First Nations in Quebec and Labrador.

About the FNQLHSSC

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission is a non-profit organization that assists Quebec First Nations in achieving their health, wellness, culture and self-determination goals.

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