



NEWS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Loi de la protection sociale atikamekw d'Opitciwan (Atikamekw of Opitciwan Social Protection Act): an historic move forward for First Nations families and children

Wendake, November 10, 2021 – Representatives from the Conseil des Atikamekw d'Opitciwan, Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL) and First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) met this morning, along with several guests, to celebrate an historic move forward for First Nations families and children: adoption of the *Loi de la protection sociale atikamekw d'Opitciwan* (LPSAO). A first in Quebec, this act will allow the community of Opitciwan to be totally autonomous in matters of child protection, in accordance with the *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*.

“We finally have the means to ensure the wellness of our children, while promoting and guaranteeing accessibility to preventive services in an environment that is safe, suitable and developmentally appropriate for our families. The child’s best interests lie at the heart of our approach and several elements, lacking in provincial and federal jurisdictions, will be determining factors in the LPSAO, including the child’s cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual identity, heritage and education,” concluded Jean-Claude Mequish, Chief of Opitciwan.

“Outstanding work has been carried out since the federal Act was passed, on June 21, 2019. Today, we are pleased to see this work come to fruition. I would like to congratulate all the people who have participated, directly or indirectly, in the development of the LPSAO. Opitciwan is a true source of inspiration for our peoples, and I am confident that the children and families of this community will benefit from all the help and support they need,” said Derek Montour, President of the FNQLHSSC Board of Directors.

“I want to commend the determination of the Atikamekw Nation of Opitciwan. By affirming our right to self-determination, we are creating a system that will help eliminate the overrepresentation of our children in the youth protection system. We have been collectively investing for over three decades to take back responsibility for the wellness of our children and communities. Our children are the hope and future of our peoples and they deserve that we join forces to offer them a promising future. Nobody is better positioned to do this than us,” stated Ghislain Picard, Chief of the AFNQL.

In addition, it is worthwhile noting that, to date, nine notices of intention (for 15 communities) have been sent to the federal and provincial governments to exercise legislative jurisdiction over child and family services, as well as four requests (for 22 communities) to enter into a coordination agreement regarding the exercise of this jurisdiction. Other communities will certainly follow Opitciwan’s lead in the foreseeable future.



About the Conseil des Atikamekw d'Opitciwan

The Atikamekw community of Opitciwan is located northwest of Lac-Saint-Jean, about 250 km from Saint-Félicien. It has around 3,000 residents, 50% of whom are under the age of 24. The Conseil des Atikamekw d'Opitciwan makes every effort to affirm the Atikamekw identity, values, language, culture and autonomy. It is in this spirit that it decided to obtain its full autonomy in matters of child protection.

About the AFNQL

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador is a political organization that unites 43 First Nations Chiefs 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 supports First Nations in Quebec in achieving their objectives in terms of health, wellness, culture and self-determination.

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