

Squamish Nation Statement on defeat of the Child & Family proposal

October 18, 2024

Calgary, AB – The Squamish Nation is celebrating the defeat of the draft *Final Settlement Agreement on the Reform of the First Nations Child and Family Services Program*. This proposal failed to adequately address the needs and rights of our Nation's children and families. After significant engagement and reflection, we stand united with other First Nations across Canada in calling for a new approach that puts our children, families, and communities at the center of decision-making.

As a Nation deeply committed to the well-being of our children, we strongly opposed the draft Final Settlement Agreement. It would have set unacceptable limits on our ability to provide culturally appropriate, community-driven services for our people. The draft Final Settlement Agreement did not provide the guaranteed long-term, sustainable funding required to ensure discrimination stops and never happens again. The necessary safeguards are needed to ensure that First Nations governments can lead and manage services tailored to the unique needs of our children.

The Squamish Nation opposed the draft Final Settlement Agreement for several critical reasons:

1. **Flawed Implementation Structure:** The draft Final Settlement Agreement contained significant flaws in its proposal for long-term reforms to the federal child and family services program. Key concerns include the need for robust control mechanisms to ensure accountability, insufficient regional representation in the implementation process, and an overly dominant role for the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). These shortcomings would have undermined the ability of First Nations to exercise meaningful control over services affecting our children.
2. **Weak Commitments to Long-Term Reform:** While the draft Settlement Agreement outlined \$47.8 billion in funding over ten years, this financial commitment depended on annual parliamentary approvals and other vague, undefined federal approval processes. Such uncertainty would have left the future of First Nations children vulnerable to political shifts and funding cuts. A new agreement must establish legally binding, long-term

commitments that extend beyond a 10-year window to ensure that systemic discrimination against First Nations children ends once and for all.

- 3. Inadequate Dispute Resolution Mechanisms:** The draft Final Settlement Agreement failed to provide effective safeguards to prevent future discrimination against First Nations children. Most concerning, it proposed limiting the role of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, removing a key avenue for holding Canada accountable should discriminatory practices persist. A robust, independent dispute resolution process is essential to ensuring that First Nations children are never again subjected to the injustices they have faced.

A Call for Canada to Return to the Table:

We call on the Government of Canada to return to the negotiation table to fix the agreement. First Nations must have a central role in shaping any future settlement, with full transparency and a commitment to meeting each nation's specific needs.

The Squamish Nation remains committed to working collaboratively with others across the country to ensure we create and finalize new agreements as soon as is practicable.

"We are calling on Canada to engage with First Nations in a process that truly reflects our needs and aspirations for our children and future generations," said Khelsilem, Chairperson for the Squamish Nation. *"Our children deserve a future free from discrimination. We are ready to work toward a new agreement that reflects the best structure for ending the discrimination of First Nations children."*

A Path Forward

The Squamish Nation supports a renewed negotiation process built on principles approved by Chiefs and Proxies in Calgary, ensuring that the voices of First Nations are central to future discussions. These principles include:

- **New Negotiation Team:** The next phase of talks will be led by a newly appointed negotiation team, with a restructured approach and fresh legal advisors. This change is critical to advancing negotiations that better reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of First Nations across Canada.
- **Openness and Transparency:** Future negotiations must prioritize openness and transparency. First Nations must be given the opportunity to engage meaningfully, with clear, honest communication at every stage of the process. This ensures that communities are well-informed and that their interests are respected throughout the negotiations.

- **Meaningful Engagement and Consensus Building:** Any future agreement must be shaped through an inclusive process that allows for thorough information sharing, robust feedback mechanisms, and the incorporation of that feedback. A fair and transparent process is essential to building a strong national consensus among First Nations, ensuring broad support for the agreement before moving forward.

We call on the Government of Canada to demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation by addressing the severe shortcomings in the Draft Settlement Agreement and returning to negotiations with a renewed focus on achieving justice for our children.

The Squamish Nation will continue to advocate for the rights of our children and families and will work alongside other Nations to ensure a fair and equitable agreement.