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of BRITISH COLUMBIA



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Sonia Furstenau, MLA  
Cowichan Valley

January 18, 2018

Dear Minister Conroy,

It has come to my attention that MCFD intends to apprehend an infant from the Cowichan District Hospital this week. The infant's mother is Cowichan Tribes and has expressed a strong desire to keep her child. There has also been community and family support, including people who are willing to provide 24-hour support for this mother and her newborn. This case raises—again—the systemic issues we continue to encounter with your Ministry's treatment of families and communities in my riding.

In your Ministry mandate letter from Premier John Horgan dated July 18, 2017, you were tasked with making "substantive progress" on:

- Implementing the recommendations from Grand Chief Ed John's report and provide better supports to keep Aboriginal children at home and out of care.
- Reducing the number of Aboriginal children entering our care system a priority.

As Minister, you are also responsible for moving forward on implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One of the guiding principles in creating the UNDRIP report was to "*recognize in particular the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child.*"

Given the clarity of the mandate letter and the promises made by the NDP government, I am disappointed and dismayed that in my riding there seems to be no substantive change in MCFD's actions.

What I have heard from families leads me to conclude that Ministry actions often do not meet the most basic levels of your own Child and Family Development Service Standards - and this conclusion is reinforced by the Ministry's internal audits of Service Delivery Areas.

In the case with the mother and her newborn in Cowichan, I ask that you inquire with Ministry staff whether they can provide you with evidence that Child and Family Service Standards have been met, in particular Standards 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 19, and 20.

For example, CFD Standard 2 states:

*To preserve and promote a child's Aboriginal heritage and connection to his or her Aboriginal community, the following must be involved in all significant decisions when determining the child's Aboriginal connections, heritage and descent, and when assessing, planning and providing services for the child:*

- o the child*
- o the child's family*
- o the child's extended family*
- o the child's Aboriginal community*
- o the identified delegated agency and any other community agencies involved with the child and family, and*
- o any significant people identified by the child and his or her family or Aboriginal community*

Recognizing the privacy issues around specific cases, I am asking that your staff provide you with the evidence that all of these steps have been taken in this specific case. I also ask that you inquire whether stipulations of Sections 20, 21, 22, and 30 of the Child, Family and Community Services Act have been fully met.

As elected members of the Legislature, I feel that it is our shared responsibility to ensure that the highest standards of public service are met, and that legislation is being followed. If this is not happening, it's imperative that concrete actions and steps are taken.

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In general terms regarding your Ministry, I would like to know what specific steps have been taken to reduce the number of Indigenous children in the foster-care system? If the numbers have been reduced, please provide data as to this change. I would also like to know what specific steps MCFD has taken since you became Minister to implement recommendations from Ed John's report? Finally, what specific new supports have been put in place for Indigenous families?

Status quo is unacceptable. Any inaction on your mandate makes your Ministry complicit in the tragic long-term impacts that we all know to be directly related to the removal of children from their families and their communities, not least of which, today, is that Cowichan mother and her newborn.

I look forward to seeing true leadership from you on these urgent and pressing matters.

Sincerely,



Sonia Furstenau  
MLA for Cowichan Valley

cc:

Honourable Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation  
Bernard Richard, Representative for Children and Youth  
Dawn Thomas-Wightman, Deputy Representative for Children and Youth

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