

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Statement

Indigenous and Human Rights Organizations Call on Cancellation of \$120M Remand Center

October 2021 (Saskatoon SK) – Saskatchewan’s 2021-2022 provincial budget has confirmed plans by the Government of Saskatchewan, under the leadership of Premier Scott Moe, to move forward with its \$120 million expansion of the Saskatoon Remand Center, expected to hold an additional 427 people in its 216 cells.

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples joins together with the Association of Metis, Non and Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS), the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan, CLASSIC Law, Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, and the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan to denounce the wasteful spending on a facility that will overwhelmingly house Indigenous people who have not been convicted of any crime. An individual on remand is someone held in custody while waiting for their trial or sentencing.

This coalition of Indigenous and Human Rights organizations is calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to cease moving forward and redirect resources to communities where they are needed. The construction of this facility is a waste of scarce tax revenue and does nothing to address the problems that make Saskatchewan a leader in excessive pre-trial imprisonment.

Indigenous people are massively overrepresented in the justice system. Meanwhile, Indigenous communities continue to experience high rates of poverty, and services for restorative and community justice, mental and physical health treatment, and economic opportunities remain under-funded in Saskatchewan.

Statement from Kim Beaudin, CAP National Vice-Chief:

“Three-quarters of inmates in Saskatchewan are Indigenous, because of racism and discrimination. The government’s solution is to spend hundreds of millions warehousing even more of us. This center, Premier Moe’s “jail of dreams”, will lock up people who haven’t even been convicted of crimes, despite COVID proving that being jailed puts their health and lives at risk and fails to even support the administration of justice. The province can’t guarantee the protection and the safety of people on remand”.

Statement from Charlene Lavallee, President of AMNSIS:

“The purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action (2015) were to address the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation in Canada. Articles 30, 31, 38 and 42 call on both the federal and provincial governments to;

- #30 - Commit to eliminating the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress.

- #31 - To provide sufficient & stable funding to implement and evaluate community sanctions that will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment and respond to the underlying causes of offending.
- #32 - To undertake reforms to the criminal justice system to better address the needs of the offenders with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), with 4 guiding points.
- #38 - To commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in custody over the next decade.
- #42 - To commit to the recognition and implementation of Aboriginal justice systems in a manner consistent with the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples, the Constitution Act 1982, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by Canada in November 2012

Many of those Calls to Action have not been addressed by this current government of Saskatchewan, in fact this initiative is in contradiction to the Calls to Action. This government of Saskatchewan has made a decision to spend over \$120 million for a remand facility to house people who have not yet been found guilty of a crime! I have requested the reports and statistics the Saskatchewan Government used to assess and base their decision on for spend millions of dollars. To date I have not received the information.”

Statement from Carly Romanow, Executive Director of Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan:

“Through the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a decrease in the number of people held in jail on remand. Despite having people in the community instead of on remand, we did not see an increase in crime in Saskatchewan. Funds allocated to the new jail should be dedicated towards community supports, such as long-term housing, long-term mental health support and long-term addictions support.”

Statement from Pierre E. Hawkins, John Howard Society of Saskatchewan:

“Saskatchewan holds people on remand at twice the rate of other provinces. The way we prosecute bail applications and administration of justice charges is largely to blame. The government is spending a fortune on a band-aid solution and has done little to address the real problem: we jail too many people.”

Statement from Kayleigh Lafontaine, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Saskatchewan:

“Our current Provincial Correctional centres are at full capacity and environmentally are at a breaking point. Building a multi million-dollar Remand centre is NOT the answer- focus on creating trauma informed stable housing supports with wrap around medical, addiction and mental health services lead by compassion and harm reduction is the key to creating change within individuals in front of our Justice systems. We call for Restorative Justice practices lead by indigenous and community-based organizations.”

Statement from Nicholas Blenkinsop, Community Legal Assistance Services For Saskatoon Inner City Inc. (CLASSIC):

“In signing on to this letter CLASSIC recognizes that CAP, as an independent organization, speaks emphatically and eloquently with its own voice about an important issue. The concerns that CAP raises about the propriety of spending money to keep people in jail are appropriate. Jails do not make society safer. This is well-known. It was proven, again, during this pandemic. What is needed instead are resources directed to the underlying causes of criminality. CLASSIC urges the government of Saskatchewan to move proactively to addressing the issues which will work to make Saskatchewan safer for everyone, rather than putting its resources into institutionalizing yet more people – primarily Indigenous people.”

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The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is the national voice representing the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 70% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.