



For Immediate Release
February 14, 2023

BC First Nations Justice Council Calls for Stricter Police Oversight and Accountability Amid Report that RCMP Officers Failed to Investigate Claims of Sexual Abuse of Indigenous Women and Girls by Prince George Officers

BCFNJC Will Engage First Nations Leaders and Rightsholders in conversations about police service delivery, accountability and oversight at their Justice Forum March 6-8, 2023 in Vancouver

February 14, 2023 – tkwəlniw̓t (Westbank), Okanagan Syilx Territory, BC: Today, the BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) stated in response to Ian Mulgrew's recent opinion piece, "*Allegations of Mountie complicity in violent, sexual abuse of Indigenous girls in Prince George were not investigated*" that it is appalled, but not surprised by the lack of action taken by the RCMP to investigate the claims reported by constable Lisa Mackenzie to staff sergeant Garry Kerr in August 2011.

Strategies 3 and 22 of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy call for a fundamental Indigenous-led transformation of police service delivery, oversight, and accountability.

In response to the op-ed, Judith Sayers, BCFNJC Director, had the following to say, "The Civilian Review and Complaints Commission Report reaffirms what BC First Nations have been saying for decades. First Nations people and in particular, our women and girls, are still being targeted and abused without fear of penalty or prosecution. The complacency exhibited by the police following Ms. Mackenzie's disclosures and lack of investigation into claims of systemic violence committed against our women and girls at the hands of public servants in positions of authority and power is reprehensible. If it had not been for Ms. Mackenzie's courage and Mr. Kerr's determination, we would not even be aware of these allegations."

"During our early engagement efforts, we found that claims of violence against First Nations people in Northern British Columbia were rising at an alarming rate. We identified Prince George as an area of immediate need and that is why we opened one of our first Indigenous Justice Centre in the downtown core." Boyd Peters, Director of the BCFNJC said.

BC First Nations Justice Council

303-1979 Old Okanagan Hwy, Westbank, BC. V4T 3A4 Office: 778-940-1520
bcfnjc.com

The BCFNJC Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) seek to provide culturally appropriate and respectful wraparound legal services to Indigenous peoples throughout the province. To date, BCFNJC has opened three physical IJCs located in Prince Rupert, Prince George, and Merritt, as well as a virtual IJC for those who live in remote communities. A fourth brick and mortar IJC will be open in Chilliwack soon, and 10 additional centres will be open by the end 2024.

The BCFNJC has received funding from the Law Foundation of BC to work with First Nations and engage with Rightsholders to improve policing accountability through the creation of a policing accountability unit. The purpose of the unit will be to investigate claims of police violence and abuse perpetrated against First Nations and to support community members whose loved ones have been harmed by police.

In specific response to the overwhelming need for stricter police oversight and accountability, we partnered with the BC Assembly of First Nations and hosted the Policing Essential Services Conference in 2021 and made a submission to the *Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act*. Both will inform our approaches to and development of our police oversight and accountability unit.

Policing oversight and accountability will also be a key issue and area of engagement at the 2nd Annual BCFNJC Justice Forum scheduled to take place in Vancouver from March 6-8, 2023. Rightsholders are invited and encouraged to register for the Justice Forum online at <https://bcfnjc.com/2023-justice-forum/>.

About the BCFNJC:

The BC First Nations Justice Council has been entrusted with the mandate to transform the justice system and create better outcomes for Indigenous people through implementation of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy.

The strategy, signed March 06, 2020, was jointly developed by the BC First Nations Justice Council, BC First Nations communities and the Province of British Columbia. It includes 43 actions along two paths which involve the reformation of the current system as well as the restoration of First Nations' legal traditions and structures.

Media Contact:

Judith Sayers, Director
Direct: 250-415-0387

Boyd Peters, Director VIA Communications and Engagement
Direct: 236-455-0513 communications@bcfnjc.com

BC First Nations Justice Council

303-1979 Old Okanagan Hwy, Westbank, BC. V4T 3A4 Office: 778-940-1520
bcfnjc.com