

**INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S GROUPS DENOUNCE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION'S SILENCE ON  
INQUIRY INTO SYSTEMIC RACISM AT BATSHAW**

**For Immediate Release**

**Montreal, April 19, 2022** – Exactly six months after it asked the Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission to launch an inquiry on its own initiative into systemic racism in employment and service delivery at Batshaw Youth and Family Centers, the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal (NWSM) still has not received any response.

The silence is treated as the Commission's failure to live up to its national commitment on Reconciliation and the Viens Commission's calls to action on access to justice for Indigenous people. Last week, NWSM called on Indigenous Affairs Minister Ian Lafrenière and the Minister responsible for Youth Protection, Lionel Carmant, to intervene.

On October 19, 2021, NWSM in cooperation with CRARR asked that the Commission examine barriers to the equitable representation of Indigenous people in all job categories at Batshaw and the CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, which manages Batshaw. NWSM has been concerned about staffing practices that discriminate against Indigenous people, such as filling designated Indigenous positions with non-Indigenous people, and job requirements that exclude Indigenous candidates.

NWSM also asks that the Commission examine systemic racism in services for Indigenous families at Batshaw, including problems with accurate data collection on Indigenous status resulting in misidentification of Indigenous clients; racial profiling of Indigenous children and mothers, and perpetual lack of culturally adapted services.

In November, NSWM's request received official support from Quebec Native Women and the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL). In fact, AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard wrote to the Commission Chair Philippe-André Tessier himself in support of the request.

Six months later, the Commission has yet to respond. In the meantime, other incidents involving Batshaw's treatment of Indigenous children continue to raise concerns.

Last December, CRARR filed a complaint on behalf of an Inuk youth who was kept in detention in a windowless basement room with little communications tools for three days at Batshaw, allegedly as a COVID-19 prevention measure. Despite this assertion,, the youth was not given a COVID-19 test until his teacher showed up to the facilities on day 4 of his detention to demand that he be tested and released. An internal review of the case, conducted by the Complaints Commissioner at the CIUSSS-ODIM, had many flaws, including the failure to interview the victim in question.

Despite CRARR's request for an update on March 17, 2022, the Commission has never replied. The youth has never been contacted for an interview.

Since making the request, NSWM continues to witness situations involving Indigenous mothers and their children that resemble birth alerts practices (targeting and apprehending infants from Indigenous mothers right after they give birth).

The NWSM's letter to Minister Carmant is enclosed.

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CRARR will bring this situation to the attention of the UN Committee which will examine Canada's performance on the Convention on the Rights of the Child next May.

## **QUOTES**

### **Nakuset, Executive Director, NWSM**

"The Human Rights Commission's complete silence over the last six months is both disconcerting and unsympathetic towards Indigenous women in need and children in care. This is not what Reconciliation is about. We come to you in order to have access to justice and effective protection towards Indigenous children. We need accountability and change, not broken promises and bureaucratic indifference."

### **Marjolaine Etienne, President, Native Women of Quebec**

As recommended by the Viens Commission and the Laurent Commission, Indigenous people in Quebec must decide on the future of their own children through the creation of their own youth protection programs. The services currently received are not culturally appropriate and are discriminatory. This results in some Indigenous children experiencing racism and systemic discrimination because of their Indigenous identity, and this is why we support the call for an inquiry."

### **Fo Niemi, Executive Director, CRARR**

"We are very dismayed over the Commission's refusal to act and act quickly in the case of the Inuk youth who was detained and deprived of his freedom by Batshaw for three days in a windowless basement room, without legally valid reasons. The Commission's inaction and silence has sent a very poor message to Indigenous children and parents in Quebec about their worth and civil rights."