



LETTER OF SUPPORT

October 2020

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Michael Redhead Champagne and I am a co-founder of Fearless R2W Child Welfare Education and Advocacy initiative. I am writing this letter of support in favour of a strong and well funded Public Interest Law Centre that can continue to do the advocacy needed for so many families, like the ones we serve.

Q: why do families that are already dealing with difficulties in child welfare also have to deal with the financial costs in a system that costs money and takes them away from employment or education?

A: funding a strong PILC removes one of the systemic and financial barriers for families

Supporting PILC and the services they provide would do so many things for the families we work with. It would continue to support families involved in child and family services, people in the North End of Winnipeg, primarily Indigenous families and primarily living in low socio-economic conditions. In the North End of Winnipeg, families are caught up in the legal system and because of demographics, geography and socioeconomic circumstances, our families often have three strikes against them before they make it to their first court appearance. If we support access to justice for these families, like the ones Fearless R2W serves, we could not only increase peoples access to justice, but we could also reduce the number of children in care, which would allow Manitoba to be in alignment with their own child welfare report I was part of sitting on in 2018

As an Indigenous led organization we recognize how frequently our lives are played out in the court, and knowing how systemic outcomes do not favour Indigenous families in terms of income, health, education, child welfare or justice, we must strongly ask that PILC remain in service of these families. In the last 4 years, I have seen on numerous occasions the need for families living in low income to have access to legal services, just like the service



provided at Public Interest Law Centre. I can't imagine the shape families would be in if PILC had not done the following things in child welfare at the systemic level:

A) worked with families of MMIWG and Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs on "Families First" report on MMIWG - put together legal team of 8, amplifying the voices of families affected by systemic violence

B) represented Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs at National MMIWG Inquiry which made key recommendations on child welfare including a) ending birth alerts b) giving real weight to Indigenous legal traditions

C) appearing at Court of Appeal in support of Meredith Mitchell - to highlight the bias in the child welfare system and the over-representation of Indigenous families. I will also mention that Meredith Mitchell has been absolutely essential to our families being able to navigate, understand or access the legal system in the province of Manitoba as families navigate child welfare, housing EIA and other systems.

D) supporting First Nations Family Advocate Office in efforts to develop a legal clinic on child welfare matters. We have often referred First Nations families to FNFAO and in turn, they refer on First Nations families to us.

When we have a strong PILC, we can tangibly say we are good partners in reconciliation in the above ways, and also accomplish some of the reconciliation recommendations from past reports including:

- **fulfilling MMIWG Calls for Justice 5.13 - 5.13**
 - We call upon all provincial and territorial governments to expand and adequately resource legal aid programs in order to ensure that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people have access to justice and meaningful participation in the justice system. Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people must have guaranteed access to legal services in order to defend and assert their human rights and Indigenous rights.
- **Fulfilling Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls To Action 31**
 - We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to provide sufficient and stable funding to implement and evaluate community sanctions



that will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders and respond to the underlying causes of offending.

- Follow some of the provinces own recommendations from CFS Reform* & Justice Reform reports, namely "TRANSFORMING CHILD WELFARE IN MANITOBA Report (2018)"
 - **Theme 8: Youth Rights / Recommendation 2.** That the legislation contemplates court-appointed advocates or guardians ad litem to represent their rights. See Appendix B for a relevant excerpt from Nova Scotia's legislation.
 - Legal Aid and PILC are already serving this purpose! Let's strengthen that opportunity for children in the system to have legal representation & a legal voice.

I hope that you can understand why a group like Fearless R2W believes that these services are so essential to supporting families and family reunification. We are more than willing to answer any questions you may have about the comments we have made at my email address mc@fearlessr2w.ca.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Redhead Champagne".

Michael Redhead Champagne,
Fearless R2W Board Chair