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November 20, 2015

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Langevin Block
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA), congratulations on your election win and in becoming the 23rd Prime Minister of Canada. We also congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister of Youth and look forward to engaging with you on important issues affecting youth in Canada.

On this National Child Day, November 20, 2015, the members of the CCCYA are writing to call on you to work with your provincial and territorial colleagues to address the dire situation of Indigenous child welfare in Canada. We welcome your intention to renew the relationship between Canada and its Indigenous peoples through a nation-to-nation process to address pressing issues such as child welfare.

The CCCYA is an association of, government and parliament appointed children's advocates for the nine provinces and two territories of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Québec, Saskatchewan, and Yukon with mandates to support the rights of children and youth and to promote youth voice. Through the Council, we identify areas of mutual concern and work to develop ways to address issues at a national level.

In our work advocating for the rights of children and youth, we have a special regard for the circumstances facing indigenous children and youth—one of the most vulnerable groups of children in

Canada. Indigenous children have significantly poorer health status, they lag significantly in educational outcomes and they are too often the victims of sexual exploitation and violence. Many of these children experience deep levels of poverty.

The over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in care, and the state of Indigenous child welfare is a longstanding and major concern of the CCCYA, as it is to others concerned with the welfare of children in Canada.

In a 2014 speech, the Honourable Edward (Ted) Hughes, a former judge who has overseen investigations and inquiries into child welfare in Manitoba and British Columbia, called the situation an “unconscionable national embarrassment,” especially in a country that “purports to be a leader in the advancement of human rights, both at home and abroad,” saying that this issue must be addressed at a national level. In 2012, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed similar concerns in its concluding observations on Canada’s implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee noted that indigenous children are over-represented in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, and that there has been a lack of action on the federal Auditor General’s finding that fewer resources are provided for child welfare services to Indigenous children on reserve than to those off reserve, both of which warranted further attention.

We have urged the federal, provincial and territorial governments to address this problem, but have witnessed little concrete action in response. Our latest statement on this matter, a release on November 19, 2015 for National Child Day, is attached.

The CCCYA has also made repeated calls to the federal government to create a national children’s commissioner with a particular focus on Indigenous children and youth. As you are aware, Liberal Members of Parliament introduced private members’ bills C-418 and C-701 to establish a national commissioner, both of which were supported by Liberal and NDP members.

We appreciate that addressing this problem and finding a solution is not the sole responsibility of the federal government, but a shared responsibility with the provinces and territories. However, there is an opportunity at this time of a new federal government for it to show leadership in bringing together and working with provincial and territorial governments and Indigenous communities to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to address this over-representation. Such a strategy could

include the establishment of a national children's commissioner, and acting on the unanimous 1989 all-party resolution in the House of Commons to eliminate child poverty among Canadian children. The implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission directed to child welfare will also contribute to addressing this issue.

Members of the CCCYA would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this matter further and provide further information about our work.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Irwin Elman
President
Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

cc: The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs
The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social
Development