Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday January 14, 2009 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

NAN HOPEFUL STANDING WILL BE GRANTED AT BUSHIE INQUEST

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler is hopeful that NAN and legal counsel for the family of Reggie Bushie will be granted standing in the coroner's inquest into the death of Reggie Bushie following pre-inquest proceedings in Thunder Bay today.

"NAN made submissions to Dr. David Eden, presiding coroner, as to why NAN has a substantial and direct interest in the proceedings," said Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. "Only by determining the circumstances surrounding the death of Reggie Bushie can we fully understand how this tragedy occurred and what can be done to prevent deaths under similar circumstances."

Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) also sought standing for the inquest.

"We welcome INAC's presence at this inquest as we need to look at broader, systemic issues affecting our students including education funding and policies," said Fiddler. "INAC's participation is a crucial piece to this process."

Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST), legal counsel for the Bushie family, and NAN also filed motions questioning the validity of the selection process of the five-member jury for the inquest. These issues are to be determined at a later date.

"The jury roll issue must be dealt with," said Fiddler. "In order for the community and the family to have confidence in the process there has to be transparency in the jury selection."

Reggie Bushie, 15, died last fall while attending school at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay. The inquest into his death by the Office of the Chief Coroner was requested in February 2008 by NAN and Bushie's parents, Berenson and Rhoda King of Poplar Hill First Nation.

A total of five youth from NAN territory attending Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School have died in Thunder Bay since 2000.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation is a political territorial organization representing 49 First Nation communities within James Bay Treaty 9 and Treaty 5 territory – an area covering two-thirds of the province of Ontario.

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For more information please contact *Michael Heintzman, Media Relations Officer – Nishnawbe Aski Nation (807) 625 4906 or (807) 621 2790 mobile.*

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BACKGROUNDER

Wednesday January 14, 2009 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

REGGIE BUSHIE INQUEST

- The body of Reggie Bushie was recovered from the McIntyre River in Thunder Bay on November 1, 2007. Bushie was last seen alive along the riverside on October 26, 2007.

- The coroner's inquest into the death of Reggie Bushie is scheduled to begin Monday January 19, 2009 with Dr. David Eden presiding. The inquest is expected to examine the circumstances surrounding Bushie's death as well as issues relating to how First Nation students are impacted when attending schools away from their communities.

- Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Berenson and Rhoda King, Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth have filed motions for standing during the inquest. Should they be granted standing, the legal council representing each party will be allowed to cross examine witnesses testifying at the inquest.

- In September 2008, NAN and ALST requested that the Attorney General conduct a formal inquiry into the jury roll system across the Province of Ontario.

- Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto (ALST), legal council for Berenson and Rhoda King, and NAN are questioning the validity of the selection process of the five-member jury for the Reggie Bushie inquest due to findings in 2008 that the jury roll in the Judicial District of Kenora has systematically excluded First Nation people from jury participation, even though the law requires that they be included.

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