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## **Ontario and Canada Invest an Immediate \$10M to support First Nations Youth Health and Safety**

August 23, 2017 11:00 A.M.

The Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, and the Ontario Minister of Education, Mitzie Hunter issued the following statement today.

"Today, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, Federal Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett and Ontario Minister of Education Mitzie Hunter issued the following statement regarding a joint response to the First Nations youth safety crisis in Northern Ontario:

Our governments are committed to doing all we can to ensure that First Nations students have access to a safe and supportive learning environment, regardless of where they live in the province. Currently, many students living in Northern and remote communities on NAN territory are unable to complete high school on reserve and have to leave their families and communities to obtain a secondary education. In July, NAN requested that a state of emergency be declared in response to a crisis for the safety of Indigenous youth in the city of Thunder Bay. We have heard that students and families do not feel safe leaving their communities and this has resulted in students having to choose between their education, their well-being and safety by remaining on-reserve. This is unacceptable.

NAN has developed a plan of action to respond to the student safety crisis. The Governments of Canada and Ontario are supporting that plan with a federal investment of \$4.67 million annually for the coming three years and a provincial investment of \$5.5 million for the 2017-18 school year to address the immediate needs of NAN students. This funding is in addition to specific funding for priority needs for these students that is already in the hands of communities for the September 2017 school year, bringing the total amount of new federal funding for students who leave their communities to \$14.3 million. The goal of this funding is to ensure that students will have safe and healthy school choices in an environment that offers culturally relevant and appropriate learning in the immediate term.

Some actions being taken as a result of federal investment, in coordination with NAN will include, among others:

- Coordinated on call workers programming for students to centralize the best means to respond to and support all NAN community students in Thunder Bay.
- Increased accommodation rates to match provincial rates and access safe accommodation;
- Boarding home pilot program so that organizations who know their students can arrange for their housing needs; and
- An urban-living curriculum to talk about health, safety and succeeding in school away from home.

Some actions being taken as a result of provincial investment, in coordination with NAN will include, among others:

- Support for immediate steps to address the safety and wellness of the youth attending school away from their home communities
- Enhancing existing education options for high school students who wish to continue their education in their communities and providing additional supports for staff and students
- Ensuring resources are available to accommodate students who wish to continue their education in other urban centres.

Canada, Ontario and NAN will work in partnership to ensure efficient and effective coordination of efforts and resources to address the crisis in NAN territory during the medium and long term.

The health and safety of all students is a priority for our governments. As such, we remain committed to ensuring that First Nation students - whether they reside in urban centres or remote communities - have access to equitable education that is safe and culturally appropriate."

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation added, "Our leadership met in July to address safety concerns for our students, many of whom will attend school in Thunder Bay in September. This funding meets the short-term priorities established by our Emergency Education Task Force, and we are encouraged by the response of our provincial and federal Treaty partners for immediate action to improve safety and education outcomes for our students. This is a tremendous accomplishment in such a short period of time, and I thank everyone involved for pulling together to ensure that our students are able to pursue their education in a safe and supportive environment."