



Statement

Oct. 26, 2022

For Immediate Release

Today, the British Columbia government announced proposed key amendments to legislation (Bill 38) that will act as an important step towards reducing barriers for Indigenous Nations and communities to assert jurisdiction over their own child welfare.

This is a positive development that, as Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), I strongly support. It is an important step forward that aligns provincial legislation with the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* that came into effect in 2020.

A major highlight is the announcement of a new Indigenous Child Welfare Director position to support the goals of immediately reducing the number of children in care and preventing Indigenous children from coming into care. This is a necessary and timely development, given that 68 per cent of young people in care are Indigenous, despite the fact that Indigenous children and youth comprise only 10 per cent of the province's child and youth population.

We have long known that culture is a protective factor for children and youth and that all children must feel a sense of belonging, including cultural belonging, to thrive. By aligning provincial legislation with the federal Act, consistent with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the provincial *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, these amendments will reduce barriers for Indigenous peoples to re-establish, develop and exercise child-welfare laws for their community members as well as recreate their own models for child and family service delivery, including family support, child protection and adoption services.

Today's proposed bill is one more sign that the harmful colonial approach to child welfare is slowly changing – a welcome and necessary indication of progress.

I would like to re-emphasize the steadfast commitment of RCY to walk alongside Indigenous communities as they assert jurisdiction over their own child welfare. This

is an essential component of reconciliation, and RCY is committed to assisting Nations and communities in any way we are asked and that they may deem helpful in this journey.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth