

## **COO All Chiefs Call – Indigenous Residential School Announcement**

June 15, 2021

### **Minister's Remarks**

Thank you, ORC Archibald, and thank you all for providing me with time out of your All Ontario Chiefs' meetings today to speak on this important topic.

The horrific news last month that the remains of 215 Indigenous children were found buried at a former Kamloops Residential School in B.C. made global headlines and rocked Canadians from coast to coast.

As you are all aware, it was a painful reminder of the legacy of these schools and the intergenerational trauma they continue to inflict.

Survivors of Indian Residential Schools and Indigenous Elders and leaders have told us there are similar unmarked burial sites across Canada.

Preliminary work by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was unfinished due to a lack of federal funding, identified 12 locations in Ontario, with varying levels of certainty and detail. Sadly, we know there are likely to be more.

The news from Kamloops has heightened calls for action from many Indigenous leaders, organizations and all Ontarians to identify these sites.

Today, our government is responding to these requests with an initial funding commitment of \$10 million over three years to begin this difficult work and to ensure necessary supports are available for each stage.

We know that from the outset all work must be led and supported by Indian Residential School Survivors, Indigenous Elders, leaders and communities. We will immediately engage on a collaborative process to identify, protect and commemorate Indian Residential School burial sites.

We also know that this initial commitment is a first step in what is anticipated to be a much more extensive process, and we are committed to seeing this work through to completion.

We recognize the extreme sensitivity of this work and the need for all stages of this process to be respectful of the diversity of Indigenous cultural practices across Ontario.

- Given this, one of the integral pieces to the work is ensuring culturally appropriate, trauma-informed mental health supports are available at each stage of the process.

The Office of the Chief Coroner, Office of the Chief Forensic Pathologist and Centre of Forensic Sciences will be available to provide skilled assistance to help ensure that this critical work is done to the highest standard possible, while adhering to principles of Indigenous ownership and control of information.

- Some communities may also wish to proceed independently, and we will support them in their efforts.
- We will ensure that all communities have access to credible experts, should they wish to access these services on their own.

Over the next few years, it is my hope we will work together to identify, protect and commemorate Indian Residential School burial sites and repatriate the remains of children who died, should that be the wish of the affected families and communities.

And we will explore ways to work together to increase public awareness and deepen our collective understanding of the history and continued harms of the Indian Residential School System.

We owe this collaborative approach to the many children that never made it home - to uncover the truth, rectify past wrongs and meaningfully contribute to the often-difficult work of true reconciliation.

Thank you. Miigwetch.