MINISTER
OF FAMILIES

Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8
CANADA

NOV 2 6 2025

To: Board Chair, Southern First Nations Network of Care (SFNNC)

**Re: Mandate and Priorities**

As stewards of child and family well-being across our province, we share a profound responsibility – to protect, support and empower children, youth and families. This mandate letter serves not only as a strategic guide but as a reaffirmation of our shared commitment to delivering such important services in our province.

The work of Child and Family Services (CFS) requires a steadfast focus on outcomes that promote stability and well-being. As minister, I recognize that government alone cannot meet these challenges, especially during a time of great change and restoration of Indigenous jurisdiction. It is through true collaboration – with Boards, CFS Authorities, agencies, community leaders, Indigenous partners, our front-line professionals, and families that we will ensure a decolonized child welfare system.

The safety and well-being of children is our highest priority; collaboration is critical to ensuring it. We must work together as the province, Authorities, agencies, and nations to strengthen the system to support healthy children and families. Protecting our children is a sacred responsibility we hold together and can only be achieved by our steadfast commitment to this work.

Sections 24 and 25 of The CFS Authorities Act specify the minister is responsible for setting provincial objectives and priorities for the provision of CFS and the minister may give directions to Authorities for the purpose of achieving provincial objectives and priorities.

As minister responsible for The CFS Act and The CFS Authorities Act, I am writing to outline the provincial objectives and priorities in the form of this mandate letter to your CFS Authority.

This mandate letter sets out provincial priorities and expectations, including both ongoing responsibilities and new actions. Your leadership as Board Chair is vital as we work together to improve outcomes for children, youth, families, and our communities across the province.

**Ministerial Objectives and Priorities:**

1. **Keeping Families Together – Ensuring Children Remain with Their Parents, Kin, and Community**

To support the implementation of recent provincial legislative amendments enabling family support, kinship care, customary care, and voluntary care agreements, I appreciate your leadership in advancing this critical work. These agreements are essential tools to help mandated agencies comply with federal and provincial placement priority principles, which will keep children connected to their families and communities.

As you are aware, on May 30, 2023, The CFS Act was amended to incorporate provisions addressing placement priorities for children that confirm, to the extent it is consistent with the best interests and safety of a child, placement priority is to be given to one of the child's parents (subsection 2.7(1)). These new provisions also require that there must be reassessment, conducted on an ongoing basis, of a child's placement and whether the child may be placed with one of their parents or another adult member of the child's family (subsection 2.7(4)).

Accordingly, in alignment with these goals, the SFNNC is responsible to:

- Develop an Authority specific plan to support the implementation of new agreements through policy, training, oversight, and collaboration with your mandated agencies.
- Ensure your mandated CFS agencies:
    - Explore kinship care agreements, when safe to do so, in all placements whose current caregiver is identified as the child's kin, to be documented in case planning as well for all children in care with an expiring legal status whose current caregiver is identified as the child's kin, to be documented in case planning.
    - Explore the development of a family support agreement where the agency is already providing financial, monetary, or direct support to a family.
    - Are working collaboratively with Nations to develop their own policy, standards and procedures to support the use of agreements with a specific focus on Customary Care Agreements. This includes outlining assessment and screening required to ensure the safety of caregivers and care arrangements. Authorities are to submit these documents to the Child and Youth Services Division.
- Review all place of safety placements which extend beyond six months and develop a plan for each home (e.g., foster care licensing, transition to agreement or reunification).

As you know, the Manitoba's Advocate for Children and Youth (the "Advocate") published the report "Still Waiting: Investigating Child Maltreatment after the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry" (the "Still Waiting Report") in 2021.The Still Waiting Report included two recommendations directed to the CFS Authorities in Manitoba: Recommendation 3 and Recommendation 4. The Advocate's recommendations relate to the implementation of culturally appropriate reunification policies by the CFS agencies mandated by each of

the CFS Authorities, and a case review of children under the age of five for whom reunification is planned. CFS Authorities should be implementing these recommendations.

Accordingly, please prepare an update and the next steps on the SFNNC's progress on addressing these recommendations.

## 2. Supporting the Transition of Jurisdiction to Indigenous Nations

Consistent with the province's commitment to reconciliation and the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples over CFS, which is acknowledged in both An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families and The CFS Act, the SFNNC holds a responsibility to support the transition of jurisdiction to Indigenous Governing Bodies, as outlined in Section 19.1 of The CFS Authorities Act.

This includes facilitating and supporting:

- The transition of services under The CFS Act to Indigenous Service Providers;
- The coordination of services with services delivered under this act with services delivered under Indigenous law; and
- The sharing of information with Indigenous Governing Bodies and Indigenous Service Providers.

Accordingly, the SFNNC is expected to:

- Fulfill new statutory responsibilities as set out in the amended CFS Authorities Act (section 19.1), and
- Support the development of financial analysis and processes to ensure existing CFS agencies are transferring resources (e.g., funding, assets) to Nations exercising jurisdiction.
- Ensure your mandated agencies are also supporting the transition of services to Indigenous jurisdiction. This includes:
    - Ensuring Indigenous children who are in the care of a CFS agency are either registered for First Nation membership with Indigenous Services Canada, or the child's First Nation for membership or citizenship with the Manitoba Métis Federation, as applicable;
    - Collaborating with Nations to develop a process for confirming a child's closest community and cultural ties so that ongoing service can be provided by the appropriate CFS agency for a smooth transfer to the Nation's Indigenous Service Provider, and
    - Facilitating and supporting the sharing of information with Indigenous Governing Bodies and their service providers as well as those planning/preparing for jurisdiction.
    - Responding to case transfers in a timely manner in order to ensure children and families are receiving services that align to their culture.

Collaboration and engagement are essential to these efforts, and your role in supporting jurisdiction and Nation-led CFS must remain solutions-oriented.

### 3. Financial Accountability and Transparency

The CFS Authorities Act requires Authorities to determine how funding is to be allocated among agencies it has mandated in order to meet provincial objectives and priorities as well as the objectives and priorities developed by the Authority.

Over the last several years, Manitoba has provided dedicated funding for your Authority towards ministerial priorities and objectives including:

- $1,190,000 to support National Standards which establish placement priority for Indigenous children,
- $9,433,090 to support wage increases and operational needs,
- $2,400,000 to support increased capacity in order to support the movement of cases in anticipation of Indigenous Governing Bodies enabling their own child welfare laws
- $5,213,312 to support customary and kinship care agreement implementation.
- $3,305,700 to support the rising costs of care
- $1,360,975 to support increased basic rates for caregivers
- $2,492,533 to support two new agencies as they are on their path to jurisdiction - Waywayseecappo and Long Plain Nation (Makoose C. Gamik Inc.).

Since 2023/24, the SFNNC 's funding has increased by over $25,000,000.

CFS Authorities must demonstrate sound fiscal management and transparency. Fulfilling this responsibility is essential to fostering a shared understanding of the outcomes associated with funding, aligning with our collective objectives and priorities and laying the foundation for moving forward in a strategic and sustainable way.

Accordingly, the SFNNC is expected to:

- Finalize a fiscal case transfer policy that establishes a clear methodology for transferring funding between agencies as cases move;
- Submit the required reporting that supports a clearer understanding of how priority objectives are being achieved;
- Provide financial reporting, including but not limited to:
    - Audited Financial Statements (Authority and agency);
    - Surplus/deficit reporting (Authority and agency);
    - Agency level staffing reports (including FTEs, salaries and benefits);
    - Monthly agency expenditure reports;
    - Details regarding how your Authority allocated funding for customary and kinship care agreements, and how agencies are expending these funds to support implementation;
    - Reporting on National Standards;

- Capacity funding allocations to support case transfers.

In addition, the SFNNC is asked to cooperate fully with audit processes and implement any resulting recommendations in a timely manner.

As a key partner in advancing the government's priorities, the SFNNC plays a critical role in ensuring services are equitable, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families.

I am confident in your leadership and your commitment to collaborative, accountable service delivery. To support these priorities and objectives, I will be scheduling regular meetings with you as Board Chair so that we can work together and review updates on the work of your Authority as it relates to the objectives and priorities outlined.

I have directed my department to work collaboratively with CFS Authorities to support their readiness for these regular updates as these discussions will be critical to ensuring services are delivered in a manner that preserves families, supports the transition of jurisdiction to Indigenous Nations, and prioritizes accountability and transparency.

At the heart of this mandate is a shared obligation to ensure the rights, voices and wellbeing of children, youth and families are upheld in every aspect of our work. While the expectations outlined require your Authority's clear and timely action, it is also an invitation to work collectively in true partnership grounded in accountability, transparency and reconciliation.

I look forward to working together in a renewed and results-driven relationship.

Miigwech,

Honourable Nahanni Fontaine
Minister of Families

c: Michelle Dubik, Deputy Minister of Families
Christina Moody, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child and Youth Services Division