

**First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security  
Presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee  
on the Status of Women  
June 6, 2017  
7:45AM**

Introduction:

- Good morning.
- Thank you for the opportunity to present to your committee.
- My name is Tracy Lee, and I am the Chair of the First Nations Women's Council on Economic Security.
- And my name is Marlene Poitras, a fellow member of the Council.
- The Government of Alberta established the Council to provide advice and recommendations to the province to improve the lives of Indigenous women in Alberta.
- The Council provides a unique perspective on matters impacting Indigenous women and communities.
- Past recommendations include:
  - Developing an educational tool kit for Indigenous parents,
  - Supporting anti-violence programs, and

- Leadership and empowerment programs for young Indigenous women and girls.
- As a result, the Alberta government has responded by funding the Moose Hide Campaign and the I Am a Kind Man initiative.
- These are anti-violence initiatives that use traditional values and engage men and boys in ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.
- Alberta also funded a 'train the trainer' workshop to provide leadership and empowerment programs for young Indigenous women and girls.
- However, much more remains to be done, and the federal government is integral to this work, which is why we are here today.
- I would like to share a story that demonstrates the reality that Indigenous women in Alberta face.
- Recently, a mother came to one of our Council members with a difficult situation.
- As a single mother living on reserve, she had to decide between a higher-paying job off-reserve with potential for

career growth, or a lower-paying and less fulfilling job on-reserve.

- If she took the off-reserve job, her child care benefits would decrease, she would pay more in taxes, have to travel one hour each way, and require full day childcare.
- If she took the on-reserve job, she would have a less fulfilling job without the same opportunities for career growth. However, she would save in childcare, fuel, etc. as well as maintain tax-free status.
- This woman was more fortunate than many other Indigenous women but she was still forced to make this difficult choice.

## **Demographic Profile**

- Indigenous women in Alberta are forced to make hard choices every day.
- 29% of Alberta's Aboriginal women possess no educational certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to only 10% of Non-Aboriginal women. Their unemployment rate is nearly 11%, compared to only 4.5% for Non-Aboriginal women.

- At the time of the 2006 Census, based on before-tax incomes, more than 36% of Aboriginal women, compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal women, were living in poverty.
- Indigenous women on-reserve face even greater challenges. They are less likely to possess an educational degree, more likely to be living in crowded or inadequate housing, and take home income that is significantly less than those living off-reserve.
- When looking at the numbers, it is clear that barriers to economic security for Indigenous women continue to exist in Alberta.
- Research by Blue Quills University found the Western concept of economy measures success through monetary and personal gain.
- However, the Indigenous concept of economy focuses more on how we take care of each other.
- It's about reciprocity, sustainability, and collective success.
- The First Nations and Metis Women's Economic Security Councils have defined economic security as "having access to the resources and supports that contribute to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being and give women the ability to

provide the basic needs for their families in safe and secure communities and access to opportunities to participate in the provincial economy.”

- Indigenous women and girls deserve the same opportunities to build healthy, successful and safe lives, as all other women in Canada.
- In Alberta, Indigenous women have lower rates of education and employment, and are more likely to face violence than non-Indigenous women.
- Some areas in drastic need of attention include:
  - improving access to quality health, including mental health services for Indigenous women;
  - increasing educational opportunities by working to improve high school graduation rates for Indigenous girls;
  - countering societal narratives that devalue Indigenous women; and
  - providing support for Indigenous women who move to urban centres.
- Communities and governments have a role to play in creating greater success and improving the lives of Indigenous women.

- All levels of government should engage Indigenous people in the establishment of Indigenous indicators of success.
- Funding and programming should not just follow market trends, but should consider safety, family, health and wellness, and relationships.
- Education systems should reflect traditional and current models of knowing and learning.
- Canada can and should change the way it delivers and evaluates programs and services for Indigenous people in keeping with our values and Indigenous world view.

## **Conclusion**

- In closing, we want to reiterate these points:
  - Indigenous women in Alberta continue to face numerous barriers to economic security.
  - The federal government has a role to play in addressing these barriers, and chief among them is the discrepancy in funding and services provided to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population.

- The lives of Indigenous women and girls must be valued, and respected; every Indigenous woman and girl deserves access to opportunities to enrich their lives.
- Thank you very much for giving the Council the time to share some of our views of economic security.
- We look forward to seeing what will come out of this committee's work.