



FIRST VOICE
Urban Indigenous Coalition

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community-Led Working Group on Police Oversight Announced

Thursday, June 3, 2021

St. John's, NL — To mark the second anniversary of the release of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), today First Voice is announcing the formation of a community-led [Working Group on Police Oversight](#). Bringing together Indigenous and women's organizations, community groups, academics, lawyers, and individuals with lived experience, the project aims to develop a framework to implement two key MMIWG Calls for Justice related to strengthening civilian-led oversight of police services in Newfoundland and Labrador. The project is funded by First Light, Mitacs, and the Law Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, with support from Dalhousie University's Schulich School of Law.

Compared to most other jurisdictions in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador has among the weakest and least effective systems for ensuring transparency and accountability of police. For example, at least 67 police forces operating across seven provinces are directly accountable to civilian-led oversight boards. These boards are responsible for such things as setting policies related to the training of police officers, establishing standards on the use of force, consulting with the public on local policing priorities, and other high-level matters related to law enforcement. Despite repeated calls for change, no such civilian-led mechanisms currently exist in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When it released its Final Report two years ago, the National Inquiry specifically identified the lack of civilian-led police oversight bodies as a major contributor to the "systemic harm" faced by Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in Canada. Across the country, Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely than any other female demographic to be murdered or to go missing. Yet despite this disproportionate risk, the National Inquiry also found that these groups face systemic discrimination by police forces that consistently fail to ensure they have access to the justice and protection they deserve.

While the federal government failed to meet its own commitment to deliver a National Action Plan within one year of the release of the National Inquiry's Final Report, the provincial government has yet even to begin consulting with Indigenous groups to understand local and regional priorities when it comes to taking meaningful action on the 231 Calls for Justice. "The

epidemic of missing and murdered women and girls, and the lack of accountability from police, is a national emergency that requires immediate action to address,” said Catherine Fagan, Co-Chair of the Working Group and President of First Light’s Board of Directors. “While we welcome the participation of all levels of government in the project, we simply cannot afford to wait any longer for government to lead on this issue.”

Building on prior calls made by both [First Light](#) and the [St. John’s Status of Women Council](#) for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to strengthen police accountability in the province, the First Voice Working Group on Police Oversight has already completed a legislative review as well as the initial stages of a cross-jurisdictional analysis. It is currently working to produce a Discussion Paper, to be released before the end of the summer, that will be used to facilitate broader public engagement and to develop specific recommendations for action. A final report is expected by the end of the year.

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About First Voice

Launched in 2019 by First Light in collaboration with Indigenous Services Canada, First Voice is a coalition of 11 organizations representing Indigenous Peoples, service providers, and all levels of government working together to advance truth and reconciliation in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. Our work focuses on promoting and supporting local implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).