

MTI Social File Update

April 18th, 2018

Background

- Summer/Fall of 2011, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), announced that Social Assistance Program (SAP) on reserve must now strictly mirror current provincial SAP rules and standards.
- Concerned that this change would be devastating on SAP recipients and Band finances, NB Bands challenged the decision and were later joined by NS and PEI Bands. We won the case at the Federal Court but lost on appeal.
- Liberal government elected October 2015, Chiefs lobby MPs and Minister Carolyn Bennett not to proceed with implementing the provincial social rules on-reserve..
- Minister Bennett agrees to not implement for now and agrees to establish working groups that would include First Nations representatives, her department's officials and academics to come up with recommendations for a new way forward.
- Spring of 2016, Mi'kmaq and Malecite First Nations from each of the three Maritime provinces begin a research project to undertake research on Social Assistance. Research completed January, 2018.

Social Research Findings

Many Project findings but some of the key ones include:

- The **rates are low**, have not changed since 1991, and are barely enough to survive on. Low rates have an impact on **Food security, Transportation, Self-esteem and Criminality**.
- Provincial recipients receive social programs that are not available on –reserve,
- Social program on-reserve is not funded nor designed to address many of the issues facing First Nation on–reserve.

Current Situation

- Chiefs in the Atlantic have indicated to INAC that they wish to develop their own social program based on their inherent right to be self-governing, Chiefs realize that lots of research needs to be done by our communities to fully understand how this could be best achieved. This could take many years of research and development..
- In the meantime Chiefs have indicated to INAC to continue with the status quo – another words, do not apply the provincial rates on-reserve, until we have time to begin **researching** the issue of social self-government. INAC has agreed to not apply the provincial rates on-reserve.
- The Mi'kmaq and Malecite are currently in the process of negotiating funding from INAC for Social capacity and research. This would be a necessary step to fully understand and consider the options in developing a Mi'gmaq/Malecite social program for the future.

Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs agrees to scrap Harper Government's plans to slash social assistance rates for First Nations' in Atlantic Canada.



We are very happy to report that planned cuts to social assistance rates received by First Nations' in Atlantic Canada **will not** happen.

For the past number of years, the Chiefs from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have been engaged in a series of court challenges attempting to stop the federal government from making devastating cuts to social and supplementary assistance rates for First Nations People in Atlantic Canada. Despite knowing the hardship these cuts would cause our People, the Department was determined to implement them. At Federal Court the Chiefs were successful at staying the implementation of the cuts, but lost an appeal brought forward by the Harper Government. The cuts, which **will not** be implemented, were scheduled to take place in April 2016.

The Atlantic Chiefs, with major support from our legal and technical teams from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI, as well as, the support of the newly elected Members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada, were able to convince the

new Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, to halt the implementation of these devastating cuts.

The Atlantic Chiefs have made a commitment to work collaboratively with the new Minister and her Department to develop a fair and equitable program based on a full study of the existing Federal and Provincial programs.

This work will begin in February 2016 with the goal of having an alternative plan available by March 2017.

The provincial representatives of this committee will include Chief Brian Francis of MCPEI; Chief Leroy Denny, Social Assistance Lead for NS; Chief Ross Perley of Tobique First Nation representing NB Maliseet First Nations; Chief Rebecca Knockwood of Fort Folly First Nation and Chief George Ginnish of Eel Ground First Nation, Co-Chairs of the Mi'gmaq Chiefs of NB, MTI.