



# FNCFS REFORM

Long-Term Reform of the First Nations  
Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Program

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## Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation Conclude Historic CHRT Approval Hearings for the Ontario Final Agreement

March 3, 2026 - The Chiefs of Ontario (COO) and Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) have concluded oral submissions before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) regarding the Ontario Final Agreement (OFA) Approval Motion, with final hearings held February 26-27, 2026. While these historic hearings have concluded, the CHRT is expected to release its decision in the next few months.

This milestone marks a significant step toward reforming the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) program and ensuring long-term, equitable funding and supports for First Nations children and families across the province.

"Our commitment to our communities is unwavering," said Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict. "We continue to fight for a system that recognizes our inherent rights. The Ontario Final Agreement is about more than funding, it is about securing the resources and jurisdiction necessary to ensure our children grow up immersed in their culture and supported by their communities."

"This agreement represents years of advocacy with the ultimate goal of putting the authority back in the hands of the leadership to make decisions about their children," said Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. "This authority should not rest with agencies, or with government. Our leadership have approved the OFA and called for its implementation. The question the Tribunal needs to answer is if the Chiefs are not the ones who should be making decisions about their children, who is?"

Throughout the proceedings, COO and NAN worked to ensure that the CHRT process was conducted with the highest standard of integrity, transparency, and accountability. COO rigorously examined evidence to protect the interests of First Nation children and families, ensuring the hearings were thorough and demonstrated full accountability to communities.

The CHRT upheld the integrity of this process by excluding non-expert testimony from the Caring Society's witness, Dr. Dean Neu. During cross-examination in December 2025, it was demonstrated that Dr. Neu does not have expertise in First Nations contexts, child welfare, or human rights, and did not consult First Nations individuals or child welfare professionals before writing the report.

The OFA prioritizes the wellbeing of children and families. It represents a dedicated effort to move beyond unstable "actuals" funding and towards predictable, long-term resources that support prevention, strengthen community capacity, and advance First Nations jurisdiction in child and family services.

The OFA is the result of years of dedicated work by First Nations Leadership, advisory committees, technicians, agencies, and community representatives from across the province. These efforts have helped design First Nations-led prevention programs, representative services, and post majority supports, while advancing readiness for implementation. This work includes cultural humility training, capital planning, alternative dispute mechanisms, and data secretariat development to support the pre-implementation phase of the OFA.

"We are committed to the critical work ahead," said Association of Iroquois & Allied Indians Grand Chief Joel Abram and Portfolio Holder of the COO Chiefs Committee on Social Services. "Our advocacy extends beyond this agreement. It includes advancing equitable implementation of Jordan's Principle and addressing longstanding gaps under the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement, along with system reforms in education, justice, housing and infrastructure. Comprehensive solutions are essential to supporting every aspect of First Nations life."

While the OFA is a cornerstone of Ontario-specific reform, broader advocacy continues. COO and NAN will continue to advocate for meaningful progress on Jordan's Principle and the 1965 Indian Welfare Agreement, and for renewed mandates for Canada and Ontario to negotiate regional solutions that reflect the distinct needs of First Nations in the region.

We encourage First Nations and stakeholders to stay engaged and informed as we move toward implementation. For updates, documents, and further information, please visit: <https://www.fncfsreform.ca/>

## Contact

**F N C F S R E F O R M . C A**



**Isak Vaillancourt,  
Communications Manager**

416-819-8184  
[isak.vaillancourt@coo.org](mailto:isak.vaillancourt@coo.org)



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Aski Nation**  
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**Michael Heintzman,  
Director of Communications**

807-621-2790  
[mheintzman@nan.ca](mailto:mheintzman@nan.ca)