

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT INCREASED TARGETING OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND THE HOMELESSNESS SERVICING SECTOR IN THE CITY OF THUNDER BAY CALLING FOR COMPASSION

THUNDER BAY, ON: Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) is expressing concern about increased targeting of homeless people and the MFNM homelessness servicing sector in the city of Thunder Bay calling for more compassion. This came after more than (3) three separate incidents involving direct threats and harassment of homeless people and the homeless servicing sector employed by MFNM.

The first incident took place on October 5, 2021 when a 37-year-old Fowler Township man was arrested and charged with *Dangerous Operation of a Motor Vehicle* after driving his pickup over a tent occupied by homeless people in the County Park area. The second incident, not reported to media, took place on October 16, 2021 when a group of individuals engaged in behaviours to harass and intimidate homeless people at around 2:30 a.m. in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Thunder Bay. This incident has since been reported to the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS).

The latest incident took place on October 17 and 18, 2021 when MFNM received a [threatening email/phone message](#) from a man, presumably from the Parkdale neighbourhood of Thunder Bay. This particular incident has since been reported to the TBPS and the City of Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism & Respect Advisory Committee's [incident reporting service](#).

With homelessness being an issue in almost every city in Canada and with targets in Thunder Bay's 2019 – 2024 [homelessness plan](#) of reaching community-wide outcomes of reducing: chronic homelessness, new inflows into homelessness and returns to homeless by 50% by 2027/2028—the issue is a long-term and complex one that requires the compassionate involvement of everyone. This compassion has also been called for many groups and grassroots organizations such as: Not One More Death, Hope for Change, [Diversity Thunder Bay](#) and the City of Thunder Bay Anti-Racism & Respect Advisory Committee. In addition, addressing homelessness in the city of Thunder Bay will require support for initiatives like the proposed transitional housing for Indigenous youth on Junot Street which is now has been [delayed for at least three \(3\) years now](#).

As indicated by [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#), “the causes of homelessness can be broken down into three categories:

- **Structural factors**, such as economic and societal issues that affect opportunities, environments, and outcomes for individuals. This includes poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing, and the impact of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples.
- **Systems failures**, where systems of support are inadequately delivered. Barriers to accessing public systems (health, social services, and legal supports), and failed transitions from publically funded institutions (child welfare, hospitals, and corrections) are examples of systems failures.
- **Individual and relational factors** where personal circumstances, such as crises (like sudden unemployment or a house fire), mental health and addiction, housing insecurity, and interpersonal violence, can lead to homelessness.”

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness also state that, “it is crucial that we understand the various complex and interconnected causes of homelessness so that we can direct legislation, policy and practices appropriately.” To this end, MFNM has submitted a concept paper to *Employment and Social Development Canada’s: Reaching Home - Community Capacity and Innovation* program that will look at the gaps that might exist in eliminating and preventing Indigenous homelessness in the city of Thunder Bay in an innovative and culturally competent manner. On August 12, 2021, the concept paper was short-listed for further consideration and MFNM is hoping it will be invited to submit a full proposal.

The concept paper is in-line with the one of the recommendations of Thunder Bay’s [2018 Point in Time Homelessness Count](#) report pointing to the need for an expansion of culturally competent supports as a result of the lack of Indigenous-led organizations in Thunder Bay that has ending Indigenous homelessness as its sole focus. In other cities like Victoria, British Columbia, these culturally competent support models do exist such as with the [Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness](#).

The Matawa Chiefs Council have been considering a new approach to the issue of homelessness in the city of Thunder Bay for the past two years specifically and are continuing with the [development of a strategy](#). As indicated in the discussion at the Thunder Bay City Council on October 18, 2021 with respect to homelessness including developing a city-community encampment response protocol, a Cold Weather Plan, etc.—a lot of work has been done already and at the same time, there is a lot of work to continue to do. Since March of 2021, MFNM has been supported to provide a street outreach program but unfortunately, at this time, funding is piece-meal and not committed past November 2021. MFNM has also applied for other supports through the Thunder Bay Urban Aboriginal Advisory Committee (UAAC) but the request was denied.

QUOTES

“Contrary to uneducated beliefs—homelessness is not a choice. Unfortunately, it’s a phenomenon every city in Canada faces. Targeting homeless people in their encampments and our employees in the homelessness servicing sector is not compassionate, nor helpful. What is helpful is asking local service providers how they can help, not disagreeing with initiatives that work to address homelessness like the proposed transitional housing project on Junot/Red River Streets and citizens contacting their members of parliament asking them to fully support Thunder Bay proposals that address poverty, mental health and addictions like the one submitted by the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in March of this year and the homelessness strategy the Matawa Chiefs Council will be developing this year.”

– *David Paul Achneepineskum, MFNM Chief Executive Officer*

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