



MEDIA RELEASE | June 21, 2022

Syilx Okanagan Nation Demands Maximum Sentence for Fraudulent Child Protection Worker Robert Riley Saunders

tkwəłniwt (Westbank), Syilx Territory: The Syilx Okanagan Nation is disturbed and disgusted by the plea deal struck between the Crown and Robert Riley Saunders and demands that the court provide justice for the many youth harmed by Saunders' egregious abuses of power. Saunders stole at least \$460,000 from youth, many First Nations, in government care for over a decade.

On June 22, 2022, at 9:00 am the ONA will hold a Syilx Nation Day of Action at the Kelowna Courthouse as part of the response to these injustices. We are calling on our Community members, guests in the territory, and non-Indigenous allies to join us at the Courthouse to stand in solidarity with all those harmed by Saunders' actions. Given the number of aggravating factors already proven, the ONA also calls upon the BC Supreme Court to apply the maximum penalty possible to Saunders' sentence.

"These injustices continue to be perpetrated on our lands, on our territory. As such, the Syilx Okanagan Nation demands justice for our vulnerable youth and calls upon the courts to use the full extent of the law to hold Saunders accountable. We challenge the Province to take immediate steps to ensure all social workers working for the Ministry of Children and Family Development are required to be registered with a public body to put in place monitoring and accountability safeguards. As long as government bureaucracies continue to perpetuate status quo and does nothing to enact real change and these criminal acts will persist. Truth and Reconciliation will forever remain ambiguous and our children and youth will continue to be victims of systems that fail them" stated yilmix[™] (Chief) Greg Gabriel, Syilx Child and Family Governance Representative.

Saunders, a Kelowna man, stole at least \$460,000 from vulnerable youth in government care, most of whom were First Nations, while he worked as a child protection worker for the Ministry of Children and Family Development with a falsified social work degree. Saunders spent over a decade intentionally preying upon vulnerable First Nations youth for his own personal gain, siphoning off funds from over 100 victims in Ministry care. His theft of the funds meant for Indigenous youth in care went unnoticed by his supervisor until 2017, and Saunders was fired in 2018. Despite the significant impact he had on over 100 vulnerable youth, including two who died, and the amount of money he stole, Saunders was able to hide from RCMP and avoid arrest for over a year. Adding further insult to injury, he is currently out on bail in the Kelowna area.

The Syilx Okanagan Nation joins multiple other organizations, from the BC Association of First Nations, the First Nations Leadership Council, the First Nations Summit, to the Union of BC Indian Chiefs in the demand for justice.

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The Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) was formed in 1981 as the Tribal government for the Syilx Okanagan Nation. The ONA's mandate is to advance assert, support and preserve Syilx Okanagan Title and Rights. Further, the ONA is charged with the

Okanagan Nation Alliance

101-3500 Old Okanagan Hwy Westbank, BC V4T 3J6: (250) 707-0095 www.syilx.org

forum to bring forward numerous interests and form positions on areas of common concern. For more info on ONA's Children and Families work, please visit: www.syilx.org/wellness/our-programs-and-services/children-and-families/

For information please contact:

ȳĩlmix^{wm} (Chief) Clarence Louie, ONA Tribal Chair
T: 250-498-9132

ȳĩlmix^{wm} (Chief) Greg Gabriel, Syilx Child and Family Governance Representative
T: 250-490-7250