December 7, 2023

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions

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Re: A call for RCMP recordkeeping accountability in relation to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people

We are a group of information professionals who are deeply concerned about the scarcity of sufficient, comprehensive records relating to missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls shows that although it is likely that more than 1,000 Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are missing or murdered, the exact number and the affected communities remain unknown.

The enduring colonial relationship between the justice system and Indigenous people is fraught with bias and discrimination. As a result, recordkeeping relating to these cases is insufficient and sometimes inaccurate—families often dispute the official conclusions of case files. This is especially clear in the Robert Pickton case, as families have advocated for co-conspirators to be charged and for Pickton to be charged with the remaining victims. Furthermore, inadequate record-keeping practices are outlined in the Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, informally known as the “Wally Oppal” report. Commissioner Wally Oppal outlines that the lack of information systems hindered proper investigation. This caused a significant barrier to solving the cases sooner and enforcing justice.

The recent application submitted by the RCMP to dispose of roughly 14,000 exhibits relating to the Robert Pickton cases further demonstrates that recordkeeping and documentation around this issue are still not taken seriously. While we recognize the amount of resources needed to preserve the evidence, we also acknowledge that we are in an era of reconciliation, and it is past time to answer the recommendations outlined in the two inquiries, along with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Moreover, this letter endorses the recent RCMP Destruction of Evidence “open letter.” Moreover, consistent with the National Inquiry’s Final Report calling for nationwide consistency in reporting mechanisms for missing Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, we call on the RCMP to implement a strict, consistent, and comprehensive record-keeping policy for cases involving MMIWG2S+. This is imperative for justice, accountability, transparency, and truth and reconciliation. Furthermore, a database for existing records and new caseloads must be maintained. This database must be trauma-informed, Indigenous-led, and centered on impacted families.

Therefore, in upholding our commitment towards reconciliation as information professionals, we call on the RCMP and governments of BC and Canada to intervene and support the request to preserve evidence in the Pickton case. We endorse the following Calls to Action outlined in the RCMP Destruction of Evidence “open letter.”

1. Moratorium on Evidence Destruction: We call for an immediate end to the RCMP’s disposal (including dispersion or destruction) of evidence related to the Pickton case and for adequate resources to be allocated to ensure the integrity of this evidence is preserved to ensure a thorough investigation into the unsolved cases and prevent impunity for co-conspirators.

2. Legislative Review and Reform: We call for a review and reform of the legislative framework governing evidence disposition, particularly in unsolved cases involving Indigenous and marginalized women and girls. This review should aim to create a clear, consistent, and transparent national policy that aligns with Canada’s human rights obligations to prevent and remedy violence against women

3. Strengthening Accountability: Reinforce mechanisms of accountability within the RCMP and related judicial bodies to ensure that the handling of evidence always reflects the highest standards of investigation and respects the principles of reconciliation, human rights and equality.

4. Prioritize Resources Towards the Unsolved Missing Women’s Investigations: We call for the RCMP to exercise their due diligence by prioritizing adequate resources towards the investigations of the unsolved missing women’s cases related to Pickton to ensure that they are capable of leading to prosecutions and remedies for victims. This includes ensuring that all legal avenues are explored

Both the Wally Oppal and MMIW2S+ reports play a pivotal role in unveiling the pervasive issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls, providing a comprehensive understanding of the historical and systemic challenges they face. Ignoring the preservation and prioritization of information management and archival records within the justice system carries profound consequences. The primary risk lies in hindering transparency and perpetuating historical injustices. By neglecting this critical RCMP record, there is a danger of marginalizing the voices of Indigenous women and girls who have experienced violence, denying them the societal acknowledgment they deserve.

Additionally, the failure of the RCMP and the Government of Canada to prioritize the RCMP record undermines the efforts of Indigenous people in seeking information about their family members. This neglect erodes the potential for truth and reconciliation, hindering the healing process for affected communities and obstructing the path toward justice. As technology advances, there is an opportunity to identify the DNA of co-conspirators and charge Robert Pickton with the murder of the remaining victims.

Moreover, RCMP and the Government of Canada overlooking the proper documentation and keeping of this record will jeopardize the broader goal of addressing systemic issues, hindering progress toward a more equitable and just society. The consequences extend beyond the immediate implications for Indigenous communities, impacting the collective understanding of historical events and impeding the ability to learn from the past.

In essence, ignoring the significance of the calls to action identified places at stake the pursuit of transparency, justice, and the comprehensive recognition of the experiences of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. It diminishes the potential for societal healing and reconciliation, perpetuating a cycle of historical oversight and systemic neglect.

Sincerely,

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Enclosed:

[Endorsers/Signatories - Re: A Call To Preserve Evidence In The Pickton Case (google.com)](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfagiFhCAApCR5vp64jjlXluzmZR8hnuzNGcyoZtUNcztx39w/viewform)