

NAIHL letterhead

October 4, 2006

Roger Prefontaine
Clerk, Standing Committee on
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

Greetings Mr. Prefontaine:

Thank you for your invitation made on September 29, 2006 to submit a brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

I understand the Standing Committee is conducting a study of First Nations and Aboriginal education and is currently focusing on post-secondary education. The National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning and the Aboriginal Institutes' have observed with interest that there have not been any presentations to the Committee by First Nations post-secondary institutions. If the intention of the Committee is to identify barriers and find successes in promoting the educational attainment of post-secondary learners, then you must seriously consider the needs of Indigenous controlled post-secondary institutions and build upon the success we have engendered.

First Nations and Aboriginal students are the primary business of our institutions. First Nations people and communities have mandated our institutions to address the education and training needs of our people. What we do is not merely a special initiative. While Indigenous controlled institutions lack the recognition to grant certification in the same manner as mainstream colleges and universities, our positive impact in Indigenous education should not be overlooked.

There is significant but unusual discussion about whether government should focus on elementary and secondary education as opposed to post-secondary. This is not the type of discussion that occurs within mainstream when considering how to support the achievement of students. Federal government involvement in First Nations and Aboriginal post-secondary education should not be an either/or matter.

First Nations education institutions currently fall into the vacuum between federal and provincial denial. The federal government describes their involvement in post-secondary education as a matter of social policy. The provinces are reluctant to be involved due to the fact that they have no jurisdiction with regard to the constitutional subject matter of “Indians”. This jurisdictional volleyball cannot continue.

Indigenous institutions address the need for First Nations and Aboriginal professionals in our communities, societies and Nations, just as mainstream institutions develop human resources to serve the country and its regions. A broader view of Aboriginal education is required in order to ensure success. The education of Aboriginal people cannot be limited to facilitating access to the mainstream labour market. It must also include addressing the human resource needs of First Nations and Aboriginal communities.

Not only are Indigenous institutions important to recruiting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal students, it must also be noted that they are also significant economic drivers in our communities through providing employment and other economic spin-offs just like mainstream colleges and universities in towns and cities throughout Canada.

There are sixty-four Indigenous institutions of higher learning in Canada that have been experiencing incredible success since 1971 in delivering education and training programs that impact on all aspects of life long learning and in particular, post-secondary education. Programs of study delivered by Indigenous institutions include: literacy training; secondary and alternative secondary programs; adult education programs; skills upgrading; pre-apprenticeship; trades and apprenticeship programs; teacher education programs; nursing programs; bridging programs; a wide ranges of certificate, diploma and degree programs; language programs; community workshops and professional development programs. Indigenous institutes of higher learning also provide services like: counseling and student support; student housing; youth science, math and technology camps; community access to libraries and computer laboratories; school evaluations; conduct community research; and more.

Indigenous institutions provide access to education and training programs for Aboriginal learners and have demonstrated high success rates in recruiting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal learners. Some examples of successful approaches that we use to educate Aboriginal learners and that would be viewed by mainstream as innovative include: intensive mode delivery; curriculum that is responsive to cultural and social circumstance; teaching methodology that reflects cultural background; and community-based delivery. Yet, due to the lack of formal recognition and limited access to resources, the capacity development of Indigenous institutions continues to be unnecessarily challenged.

Indigenous institutions are not eligible to receive operating grants, special grants, capital and infrastructure grants and research support like mainstream institutions. In fact, most operate on short-term funding grants. The lack of formal recognition of Indigenous institutions also means that they do not have the authority to grant provincially recognized certificates, diplomas and degrees. Thus, student credentials obtained at Indigenous institutions do not have the same currency as credentials earned at mainstream institutions.

Indigenous institutions are not the same as mainstream institutions. Indigenous institutions, along with our national and provincial coordinating organizations operate independently of organizations like the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and the Aboriginal Human Resources Council of Canada.

The very nature of our business is producing access to high quality post-secondary education and training opportunities. However, the lack of sustainable funding forces inequitable and often unfair partnership agreements with mainstream institutions forcing Indigenous institutions to find short term resources to operate programs while mainstream institutions are eligible to count the students in our programs and therefore benefit from receiving operating grants. This situation is untenable and unjust. Canada cannot continue to ignore the success being achieved by sixty-four Indigenous institutions. It is time to ensure the provision of support for Indigenous controlled education institutions.

In closing, I intend to offer the following recommendations to the Standing Committee for the advancement of post-secondary education for First Nations and Aboriginal people.

1. Affirm that education for First Nations and Aboriginal people must be addressed from a life long learning perspective, which includes: early childhood development: kindergarten to grade twelve; post-secondary education; adult education and training.
2. Secure recognition and sustainable funding support for Indigenous post-secondary institutions. Here are two examples of moving forward to achieve this objective:
 - a) Adopt in principle, the recommendations contained in the Indian and Northern Affairs research report titled, *Review of the Indian Studies Support Program Component of the PSE Program* by Katenies-Chignecto, March 2006 (endorsed by Assembly of First Nations and chiefs of Ontario; and

- b) Ensure Indigenous institutions access to federally designated funding for post-secondary education, including the recent federal post-secondary transfer to the provinces for infrastructure support.
3. Ensure the continuation of the Indian and Northern Affairs Post-Secondary Student Support Program on a needs basis, which requires the removal of the two per cent cap that was instituted in 1996.

Nia:wen,

Trevor Lewis
Chair

Enc. *Presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance*, National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, September 2006

- C. Jean Crowder, NDP Critic, Indian Affairs
Denise Savoie, NDP Critic, Post Secondary Education
Anita Neville, Liberal Critic, Indian Affairs
Marc Lemay, BQ Critic, Indian Affairs and Northern Development
Colin Mayes, Chair, Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs
Nancy Karetak-Lindell, Vice-Chair, Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs
Gary Merasty, Member, Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs
Tina Keeper, Member of Parliament
Regional Chief Katherine Whitecloud, Co-Chair, AFN Chiefs Committee on Education
Regional Chief Shawn Atleo, Co-Chair, AFN Chiefs Committee on Education
Peter Garrow, Director of Education, Assembly of First Nations
April Powless, Chiefs of Ontario