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CFCSA AND THE *ADOPTION ACT* DESIGNATED REPRESENTATIVES FOR MÉTIS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Summary of the Engagement with Métis Organizations and Service Providers

BACKGROUND:

- Under the *Child, Family, and Community Service Act* (CFCSA) and the *Adoption Act*, First Nations and other Indigenous communities in British Columbia are entitled to have a 'designated representative', who exercises specific powers and responsibilities under both statutes.
- Designated representatives are identified in schedules under both statutes (the Schedules).
- The current designated representative for the Métis community in B.C. is the Métis Commission for Children and Families of B.C. (the Commission).
- In Spring 2023, the Métis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC) asked to be added to the Schedules as a designated representative for Métis peoples in B.C. and to have the Commission removed.
- To make changes to the Schedules, which are set in of the CFCS and the Adoption Regulations, the Ministry Children and Family Development (CFD) is required to engage with Métis organizations beyond MNBC. CFD sought input from MNBC, the Commission, the B.C. Métis Federation (BCMF), the Red River Métis – British Columbia (RRMBC) and Métis service providers to understand how Métis peoples in B.C. wish to be represented.

<u>Citizenship and Organization Summary</u>

- MNBC is a political organization and described itself as representing nearly 100,000 self-identified Métis people, including 26,000 MNBC citizens in B.C. and 39 Métis chartered communities in the province.
- The Commission has operated since September 1999 as a small non-profit organization, established to work collaboratively with governments and all Métis organizations across British Columbia. The Commission is a service body with no political functions or direct political connections.
- The BCMF is a political organization that also advocates for and represents Métis British Columbians. The organization reported representing approximately 6,000 members in B.C. partner communities in the province. The BCMF has entered statements of cooperation with 9 partner communities across the province.
- RRMBC is a registered non-profit society, established in March 2025, that aims to represent the interests of individuals it identifies as "*true Métis*" in B.C. Its membership is small but growing. RRMBC is not affiliated with the Red River Métis in Manitoba or any other Métis organization.
- There are 5 Métis service agencies in BC:

- Island Métis Family and Community Services Society;
- Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services;
- Métis Community Services Society of BC;
- Métis Family Services; and
- Niwîḳôwin Métis Family Services Society.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION METHODS:

MNBC, Commission and BCMF

- Preliminary meetings were held with MNBC, BCMF and the Commission over the course of August 2024 to introduce the project and provide background and rationale.
- A draft Engagement Plan was developed by CFD and shared for feedback.
- Subsequent meetings were held with MNBC, the Commission, and BCMF from February to June 2025.
- CFD attended MNBC's forum on building Métis child and family services. This took place on March 13-14. CFD attended five sessions with the MNBC's Chartered Communities to discuss the project and learn more about their support to including MNBC as a designated representative.
- MNBC has engaged its Chartered Communities on Métis designation. On May 29, 2025, MNBC reported receiving "*resounding support*" from these communities during the Provincial Forum for Métis Child and Family Services, held in March 2025 in Kelowna.
- CFD attended BCMF's Provincial Information Session on April 26, 2025, presented information on designated representatives and participated in a discussion about challenges and opportunities related to representing Métis people in B.C.

Métis Service Agencies

- CFD conducted individual meetings with the five Métis service agencies (listed below) between April and May 2025:
  - Island Métis Family and Community Services Society;
  - Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services;
  - Métis Community Services Society of BC;
  - Métis Family Services; and
  - Niwîḳôwin Métis Family Services Society.

Red River Métis Association – B.C.

- CFD met with RRMBC on August 6, 2025, to discuss their written feedback on the project and to further seek their perspectives.

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ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION INPUT:

<u>Métis Nation BC feedback/perspectives:</u>

- Motivation for serving as sole Designated Representative for Métis families in BC?
    - MNBC stated that it has formally requested to replace the Commission as the sole designated representative. MNBC expressed frustration with the current governance structure and the Commission's role as designate.
        - They stated that the final 'deciding factor' was the Nisga'a/Gitxsan case, where MNBC strongly disagreed with the Commission's decision to prevent a child from returning to their non-Métis family based on a quasi-Cree Métis association in Nova Scotia.
    - It was articulated by MNBC that both the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia recognize MNBC as the governing body for Métis people.
    - MNBC asserted that it is better equipped to fulfill the role, citing its organizational capacity (over 400 staff) and substantial program and service funding.
- Engagement and other Métis Organizations
    - MNBC stated that:
        - BCMF does not have a formal agreement with the Province; and
        - The Commission is seen as an extension of CFD.
    - MNBC emphasized its strong working relationships with service providers, stating that these providers consistently approach MNBC directly, rather than other organizations such as BCMF, RRMBC, or the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF).
- Representation of Métis Peoples and Exclusion Concerns
    - MNBC emphasized that citizenship is subject to rigorous criteria - only those with a direct connection to the Métis Nation are eligible.
    - MNBC affirmed on several occasions that it represents and, as a designated representative would continue to represent, both self-identified Métis individuals and registered citizens.
- Vision for Designated Representation
    - MNBC stated that having more than one designated representative would be highly problematic.
    - The organization expressed willingness to work with the Commission during a transition period, if required.
    - MNBC raised concerns about the BCMF proposal to filter designated representation by possession of a BCMF/MNBC citizenship card. It noted that the legal system is already complex for families and this would add confusion. MNBC emphasized the need for a clear and accessible path for Métis families.

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MNBC Overview of Métis Chartered Community Engagements (July 2025)

- MNBC consulted its 39 Chartered Communities during the March 2025 Forum and reported strong, unified support for its designation. Leaders emphasized MNBC's grassroots structure and longstanding role in supporting families.
- Key considerations raised by Chartered Community leaders:
    - Information sharing: Leaders emphasized that colonial privacy frameworks often prevent communities from supporting families effectively. Designation for MNBC was seen as a means to restore data sovereignty. Participants highlighted unequal treatment and questioned why MNBC does not receive the same notifications as First Nations.
    - Centering Métis children: Keeping Métis children in the community was identified as a top priority. MNBC designation was seen as a way to increase kinship care agreements and increase the number of Métis foster families.
    - Accountability and credibility: MNBC was described as directly accountable to its Chartered Communities and grounded in democratic principles.
    - Mistrust of MCFD: Participants described a longstanding mistrust of the child welfare system. Designation was viewed as a way to encourage at risk families to seek support earlier, before serious CFD involvement.
    - Experiences with the Commission: Participants reported a disconnect between the Métis Commission and communities, with some stating they had never interacted with the organization. Experiences with the Commission were described as negative with concerns raised about missed court appearances.

The Commission feedback/perspectives

- Position on MNBC's request to become a designated representative
    - MNBC was described as the political arm of the Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia.
    - It was noted that MNBC's application for Indigenous Governing Body (IGB) status under the federal *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* was denied, and that Canada does not currently recognize them in that capacity.
    - While there was previously a positive working relationship between the Commission and MNBC, the Commission stated that this relationship has become strained at times.
    - The Commission recommended that CFD engage Métis service providers directly to understand their experiences working in MNBC.
- Representation of Métis Peoples and Exclusion Concerns
    - The Commission noted that approximately 98,000 individuals in B.C. self-identified as Métis, while MNBC has approximately 24,000 registered citizens - highlighting a significant gap in representation.

    - According to the Commission, MNBC places a strong emphasis on formal citizenship criteria, which requires documented ancestral connection to the Métis Nation.[1] The Commission expressed concern that this approach excludes many individuals (particularly children and families involved in the child welfare system) who are unable to trace their ancestry due to historical disruptions such as the Sixties Scoop, residential schools, and foster care.
    - The Commission also expressed concern that MNBC's criteria exclude individuals with mixed Métis and First Nations ancestry, as well as those raised with Métis identity and traditions but lacking formal documentation.
    - The Commission stated that it works with all families identified as Métis, whether through self-identification or family acknowledgment.
- Willingness to Collaborate
    - The Commission reiterated its openness to collaboration and expressing willingness to re-establish a working group and participate in joint meetings with MNBC and charter communities. The Commission also affirmed its ongoing commitment to collaboration with other Métis agencies such as BCMF.
    - The Commission emphasized its cultural value of collective community work, expressing a desire to collaborate for the benefit of children and families. It stated: "*We love gathering more brains together. We are passionate about the same goal - we just need help agreeing on how to get there.*"

<u>BC Métis Federation feedback/perspectives</u>

- Position on the MNBC's request to become a designated representative
    - BCMF and its Partner Communities expressed strong opposition to the proposal to designate MNBC as the sole representative for Métis children and families under the CFCSA. It stated that:
        - MNBC would only serve children of registered MNBC citizens, raising concerns that vulnerable children who are not formally registered may be excluded from support; and
        - The role of designated representative should be non-political, and a political organization may not be positioned to serve all Métis families equitably.
    - The organization cited MNBC's exclusionary practices, including the 2022 policy shift that denied Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) education funding to BCMF members. According to BCMF, MNBC justified this by stating they "*prioritized their citizens.*"

[1] This refers to the requirement for applicants to provide genealogical evidence demonstrating a direct ancestral link to historic Métis communities, including through birth or baptismal records.

    - BCMF reported that MNBC staff attempted to pressure BCMF members to renounce their affiliation in exchange for services, which BCMF characterized as coercive and politically motivated.
    - BCMF drew attention to the case of 'Baby S', the child of a BCMF member who was in the care of a Métis foster family that were also BCMF members. In this case, BCMF's efforts to support the child and family were blocked. CFD deferred to MNBC, resulting in the child's adoption outside the Métis community - contrary to the recommendations of both BCMF and the Commission.
- Position on the Commission as a designated representative
    - BCMF acknowledged that the Commission was established in a different context and that the Métis community has evolved significantly since that time.
    - The organization stated that the Commission currently faces capacity challenges but expressed support for its role and for the five major Métis service providers.
    - BCMF recommended that the Commission be resourced to build stronger, apolitical relationships with all Métis communities in B.C.
- Representation of Métis Peoples and Exclusion Concerns
    - BCMF emphasized the importance of recognizing both the Métis Nation as a diaspora and the distinct local Métis communities in the Pacific Northwest.
    - BCMF emphasized that its members are not self-declared Métis; membership is based on documented genealogical evidence, requiring five generations of Métis ancestry.
    - The organization expressed concern that Métis identity has become politicized, resulting in exclusion of individuals who do not meet narrow definitions of citizenship.
- Designated Representative Vision
    - BCMF emphasized that the designated representative must serve all Métis families, regardless of political affiliation. The role must prioritize child safety, family unity, and cultural continuity.
    - BCMF also expressed a desire for collaboration and raised concerns about being excluded from current processes. BCMF stated that they are interested in becoming a designated representative.
    - BCMF asserted that it is the IGB chosen by its members and is therefore both entitled and obligated to act as their designated representative. No other organization, BCMF argued, can represent its members' voices and choices with the same legitimacy or commitment.
    - BCMF cautioned that if CFD selects MNBC as the sole designated representative, the B.C. Government would be complicit in the ongoing discrimination against BCMF families and children.

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Service Agencies perspectives

- Position on the MNBC's request to become a designated representative
    - Some agencies expressed discomfort with the idea of a political body serving as a designated representative.
    - Several service providers noted that relationships with MNBC have deteriorated in recent years, with reduced communication and collaboration.
    - Some agencies voiced concern that MNBC may not have sufficient child welfare knowledge to operate effectively as a designated representative.
    - Several service providers reported delays in receiving funding when routed through MNBC.
    - Some service providers raised concerns about affiliation clauses recently incorporated in MNBC funding agreements, which restrict collaboration with other Métis organizations.
- Position on the Commission as a designated representative
    - Service providers were generally impressed with the Commission's performance as the designated representative, expressing appreciation for its efforts - particularly given its limited capacity and funding.
    - The Commission was generally viewed as collaborative, inclusive, and responsive, with agencies highlighting regular communication and coordination.
    - Service providers specifically praised the Commission for:
        - Supporting all self-identified Métis children, regardless of citizenship;
        - Providing cultural training and advocacy;
        - Being accessible and grounded in community needs.
    - While some acknowledged structural limitations or noted that data protection laws can occasionally limit information sharing, the Commission was seen as an effective and non-political organization.
- Position on the BCMF's request to become a designated representative
    - Most service providers reported having limited direct experience working with BCMF.
    - Most agencies did not express specific concerns or observations regarding BCMF.
    - One service provider shared a positive experience with BCMF leadership. They also expressed respect for BCMF's alignment with the Red River Métis BC Association and the Manitoba Métis Federation.
- Representation of Métis peoples and Exclusion Concerns
    - Agencies estimated that 80–99% of the children they serve are not MNBC citizens.

    - There were concerns that, if MNBC were to become the sole designated representative, many self-identifying Métis children could be excluded from services and "*fall through the cracks*".
    - MNBC citizenship processes were described as lengthy, and difficult to access, especially for families navigating crisis situations or involved in child welfare matters. Some agencies noted that applications can take up to three years, which is particularly problematic in the context of urgent child protection concerns, where timely access to support and services is critical.
    - Agencies questioned whether MNBC would offer adequate support for vulnerable children, such as assistance with genealogy or citizenship applications.
    - One service provider supported the idea of clear membership criteria, stating that self-identification alone is not sufficient, and emphasized the importance of community recognition in affirming Métis identity. The agency stressed the need to protect resources from misuse. However, they remained cautious about the risks of exclusion and emphasized the importance of striking a balance between accountability and inclusiveness.
- Designated Representatives Vision
    - Agencies noted a lack of information from MNBC regarding what a transition to designate would entail. Service agencies called for more frequent information sharing from MNBC.
    - Some service providers expressed concern that having multiple designated representatives (e.g., MNBC, the Commission, and BCMF) could lead to confusion, fragmentation, and inconsistent service delivery.
    - Others questioned whether these organizations could effectively collaborate, particularly given the current tensions between MNBC and BCMF.

<u>Red River Métis BC Association feedback/perspectives</u>

- Position on the MNBC's request to become a designated representative
    - Expressed strong opposition to the proposed change in designated representative from the Commission to MNBC.
    - Highlighted that MNBC-administered services and programs are only available to MNBC citizens.
    - Raised concerns about MNBC's political bias, limited-service eligibility, and lack of financial transparency and accountability
    - Noted that MNBC has not been granted IGB status under federal legislation.
- Designated Representatives Vision
    - Emphasized the need for impartiality, transparency, and accountability in representing Métis children and families as designate, regardless of organizational affiliation.

- Strongly recommended that the designation remain with the Commission.

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APPENDIX A: MNBC OVERVIEW OF MÉTIS CHARTERED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS 2025

DESIGNATION OF MNBC: OVERVIEW OF MÉTIS CHARTERED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS 2025

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1. Introduction

Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC) is the Métis government in British Columbia. There are 39 Métis Chartered Communities in British Columbia that collectively represent the section 35 rights of almost 30,000 Métis citizens. MNBC also advocates for the over 113,000 self-identified Métis in British Columbia and is recognized by the Provincial Government of British Columbia and the Federal Government of Canada as the Governing Nation for Métis in British Columbia.

In 2023, at the Annual General Assembly held in Kamloops, MNBC citizens passed a resolution with an overwhelming majority. This resolution declared inherent jurisdiction over child and family services for Métis people in British Columbia and authorized MNBC to exercise this jurisdiction on their behalf.

Through this mandate, MNBC was given both the responsibility and the authority to develop Métis-specific child welfare laws and deliver child and family services, including negotiating agreements and other instruments that formally recognize this jurisdiction. Reclaiming jurisdiction over children and family services is not only a top strategic priority for Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), it is also a responsibility deeply rooted in the voices and direction of Métis citizens. This priority is clearly reflected in MNBC's Strategic Plan, *kā isi nātama ōta ati nīkān (Our Way Forward)*, which affirms:

> *"Goal 1: Promote Métis Rights and Recognition and Achieve Jurisdiction of our Children – Assert our rightful recognition and jurisdiction of Métis children in care."*

With this vision in mind, MNBC and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) began working closely together to build a meaningful and formal role for MNBC in supporting and advocating for Métis children and families who are involved in the child welfare system. As part of this work, a joint working group was established with the aim of advancing three key areas:

1. Develop an information-sharing agreement with MNBC about Métis children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system.
2. Explore the designation of MNBC as the legislated representative for Métis Nation children, youth, and families in British Columbia under the *Child, Family and Community Service* Regulations.
3. Establish a legally binding agreement between MNBC and MCFD that fulfills the shared responsibility for the upbringing and well-being of Métis children in care.

This report captures the current status of the designation work, which reflects the second objective identified by the Working Group. Once that objective was identified, MNBC and MCFD moved quickly to begin the process. A central part of this work involved engaging with Chartered Community leaders to understand whether they support MNBC assuming the role of designate. The following sections provide an overview of designation and its importance for Métis children, youth, and families in BC, followed by a summary of the key discussions, perspectives, and priorities shared during the consultation sessions at the Métis Child and Family Services Forum.

2. Designation of MNBC under the CFCSR

2.1 Overview of Designation

Designation under Section 11 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Regulation* (CFCSR) would formally recognize MNBC as a prescribed Indigenous organization for cases involving Métis children. This status, outlined in Schedule 2 of the Regulation, ensures that MNBC is notified and actively involved in child welfare cases where Métis children are in care or at risk of entering the system. With designation, MNBC would gain the authority under Section 12 to appoint a designated representative to act in support of Métis children, youth, and families, as part of the Nation's responsibility to its people in child welfare matters. This representative would play an important role in advocating for the best interests of Métis children, supporting families, and collaborating with social workers and other relevant authorities. Moving forward, their efforts will focus on ensuring each child is protected and that their well-being and best interests remain the priority. This will include supporting Métis children in maintaining strong connections to their culture, community, and identity, recognizing that a sense of belonging profoundly influences their overall well- being.

Designation aligns with broader provincial and federal commitments to Indigenous self-determination in child and family services. It supports the principles outlined in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and *Bill C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families*, highlighting a continued shift toward recognizing and respecting Indigenous governance in matters that directly impact their communities.

2.2 Community Engagement on Designation

As part of the process toward receiving designation, the perspectives of MNBC's Chartered Communities were central to the work. To ensure these voices guided the work, MNBC engaged directly with Chartered Community leaders through dedicated consultations.

These took place during the provincial Métis Child and Family Services Forum, where four sessions were set aside specifically to focus on designation. The sessions were conducted in a culturally respectful way, with participants seated in a circle around Métis cultural items to emphasize equality and connection. Métis values of kindness, respect, resilience, and strength were evident as everyone supported one another, focusing on the well-being of Métis children, youth, and families.

Each one-hour session allowed for open dialogue, with two MNBC staff and two Ministry of Children and Family Development representatives available to answer questions. The sessions took place within the context of the Children and Families Provincial Forum, which offered a welcoming and inclusive environment. This setting enabled Chartered Community leaders to actively engage, contribute meaningfully, and help shape a shared vision firmly rooted in community priorities.

2.2.1 Participation and Demographics

Session	Region(s)	Number of Participants
1: March 13	5, 6, 7	11
2: March 13	2,4	11
3: March 14	1	5
4: March 14	3	7

Over the course of four sessions, the Chartered Communities leaders gathered to explore key topics related to Métis involvement in the child welfare system. The core topics helped guide the conversation, but it was the lived experiences and realities of leaders and Chartered Communities that truly shaped the direction of the sessions. The questions that shaped each session were developed to reflect what needed to be addressed for MNBC to move forward as the designate, ensuring the conversations focused on the issues that directly impact that process. The core sessions across sessions included:

- Lived experiences with the child welfare system
- Support for Métis children, youth, and families
- Métis representation in child welfare matters
- Community involvement in presentation hearings
- Impact of designation on families and communities
- Expectations of a Métis representative

2.3 Putting Authority into the Hands of Métis Chartered Communities

Through designation, MNBC will be able to place more authority directly into the hands of Métis Chartered Communities, those who are already doing the critical work of supporting families on the ground. The Provincial Forum highlighted not only the good work being done by our Chartered Communities, but also the remarkable way it is carried out, using limited resources, receiving little formal recognition, and demonstrating a strong commitment to the community.

While the work is already happening, having a formal designation with clear processes and structures will help make it more effective, more sustainable, and ultimately more impactful for both the Chartered Communities and the children, youth, and families they support. This will be a shared responsibility. MNBC understands that each Chartered Community is at a different stage in its development and capacity. Rather than taking a uniform approach, MNBC will work alongside each community to shape collaborative efforts in a way that reflects their unique context and needs.

Chartered Communities are well positioned to support Métis children, youth, and families. In line with MNBC's focus on the best interests of the child, they offer help without bias or restrictions. *"When it comes to citizenship, we would help anybody if they came into our food bank... If they need food, we give them food... We're not going to charge you or turn you away because you're this or that [self-identified or a citizen]."*

They respond without hesitation. *"Until we can get them in the citizenship process... if we have a child in crisis, we need to take care of that child."* Designation will open the door wider, allowing more Métis families to connect with MNBC and Chartered Communities for support, culture, and community.

While discussions have started through the consultation process at the Forum, Chartered Communities will have ample opportunity for further consultation and given space to discuss their capacity for involvement with designation. They will be able to determine if they would like to be actively involved with designation and the degree to which they would like to be involved. Communities that are not ready to be involved with child welfare will not be successful if they are forced to participate, in those instances MNBC will step in to provide full support. Regardless of the level of involvement, MNBC will maintain administrative oversight and offer guidance to ensure a high standard of care is maintained, and continuity of policies and procedures across communities.

Volunteers are at the heart of Chartered Communities, yet they carry heavy responsibilities that often stretch beyond what is manageable. Despite this, some are all in, ready to step

up in moments of crisis, stating, *“Just a phone call, an email, or a text saying ‘this family is in crisis,’ we would mobilize, and we would surround them.”* and some felt more hesitant to take on that workload, *"I wish we could be doing more... I can’t just do that; we are volunteering so much.”* It is important to remember that Chartered Communities are made up of volunteers, even the leaders. They often do their community work while working other full-time jobs. The capacity of Chartered Communities would grow greatly if MNBC had access to funding to support this province-wide work. Funding will make a real difference where it matters most by helping children, youth, and families access the support they need. It will allow Chartered Communities to strengthen the services they are already delivering with dedication, reduce the strain on volunteers, and build capacity for programs that families rely on. Most importantly, it will support the development of the structures and resources needed to carry out designation in a way that is sustainable, and community driven.

2.4 Words of Support: Métis Nation British Columbia as the Designate

The leaders of the Chartered Communities responded with overwhelming and heartfelt support when asked if they endorsed MNBC to become the official designate for Métis children, youth, and families. Their answer was a powerful and unified “yes,” a clear signal of trust and confidence in MNBC’s role and commitment. Below, you will find their words exactly as they spoke them, genuine and heartfelt:

“Yes hands down MNBC should be our representative, they’re our Nation, they’re the official government of the Métis people in British Columbia.”

“On a purely governance level they represent us, they have the power, they have the resources, they have the ins and outs with government officials...they have all the tools necessary to speak on our behalf, so yes, 100% I’d say yes [on MNBC being the designate].”

“As the 39 Chartered Communities decided that MNBC is our body, it just makes logical sense [on MNBC being the designate].”

“All the way around it [MNBC being the designate] makes us a stronger Nation where nobody is falling through the cracks.”

“Yes I agree that MNBC should be in charge of this for the sole purpose that no other organization can step in and try and take over that.”

“Yes I believe totally that MNBC should be in charge of this because they have the capacity, they have the resources and its our families that we want to be in control of. Definitely yes.”

“Yes it sounds like a wonderful idea.”

"I'd love to have that change [on MNBC being the designate].

"Absolutely, we need you to do that. Not only do we trust you to do that, we need you to do that...we so want it, we wanted it last year, we wanted it 10 years ago so let's make it happen now."

"I'm one hundred percent supportive of your team going forward for us." "The idea

of MNBC having that designation gives us hope for the future."

"I think unequivocally yes, the care of our children should be in our hands and MNBC is the structure that was built from our communities from the grass roots up...we cannot keep doing the same thing and asking why nothing is changing."

2.5 The Work is Already Being Done

*"It's not that we **can** do this; we are **already** doing it."* Métis Chartered Communities have long been at the forefront of supporting Métis families both formally and informally even without structured information-sharing agreements in place. These communities are not waiting for permission or systems to catch up; they are actively addressing the needs of families every day. To truly support and enhance this vital work, Chartered Communities deserve to collaborate with a government that has established relationships with them and can ensure effective, respectful communication.

During designation sessions, participants shared powerful examples of community-led support:

- Organizing Christmas hampers and cultural baskets for families in need.
- Directly connecting at-risk families to appropriate support.
- Preparing culturally grounded kits for social workers to share with Métis children and youth.
- Fostering children so they didn't have to leave the community while their parents were sick.

These examples highlight a simple truth that Métis Chartered Communities are doing some of the most important and impactful work in caring for Métis families. The path forward needs to build on what is already working while remaining rooted in community, culture, and connection.

2.6 In Their Words: Chartered Communities on the Need for Designation

"We had one young boy that was taken away from his parents and Grandma wanted him really bad, but he was taken away and he was sent to a family in the Okanagan. We fought with everything but the only reason I knew was because of [name redacted] ... how can we help them if we don't know who they are?"

"We had an experience a few years ago working out of an office in [location redacted] where the only reason a Métis child got involved in the community and culture is because their social worker saw I had a proud to be Métis sticker...and that child is now a citizen but it made me so angry and I picked up the phone and I called the Métis Commission and I asked 'why? Why did this happen? Why don't I know this child is here?' They told me it was a violation of their privacy but I'm watching other Nations know everything about their kids in care."

"We were involved as a community with them [the Métis Commission] and as the community president I would sign off on cultural safety plans for all children in care, it was an agreement we had with our MCFD office. We had a roots worker that would work in the Friendship Centre, she was Métis and she did all the genealogy...she would create all the cultural safety plans and call me in, I'd go through all the plans make sure they were good for our children...The last time I was brought in [by the Métis Commission] and told that as a Métis community leader I didn't know enough about culture which was insulting...and the social worker was totally frustrated...it was a constant fight and took about six months for this cultural safety plan to get put back in place for these children."

"We have a lady in our community...she's got 7 kids; some aren't hers but she's taking care of them. I've been helping her out personally and she's been trying to get custody of the children so she can get the proper help she needs because she's not getting any help right now. She's been late to court dates because she has no gas, she can't afford to get there, she has to drive from [located redacted] to [located redacted] which is a long drive, and her vehicle can't make the trip. It's a problem. When she leaves, she's got 7 kids in her car. There aren't enough seatbelts for them all. That's another issue, who is looking after the kids when she goes? So, I've been helping her out... I gave her grocery cards out of my own pocket, bought her a dryer out of my own pocket, her dryer broke and 7 kids, that's a lot of laundry. So, when the dryer broke, I drove to the next town to pick it up for her."

These experiences, while varied, while different, all point to the importance of designation for MNBC and the Métis Chartered Communities. They show the difficult but deeply meaningful work that Chartered Communities do every day. From these experiences, there are clear missed opportunities that would have supported Métis children, families and

Chartered Communities. Communication with Chartered Communities about at-risk Métis children would have avoided the some of the problems they faced. Community leaders would never be questioned on their understanding of Métis culture but trusted as the Métis community representatives they are. Designation for MNBC will mean a coordinated and concentrated effort to assist vulnerable Métis families. Without designation for MNBC, Métis children, youth and families face increased risk of child welfare system involvement. When community leaders and delegates were asked about designation for MNBC, they were overwhelmingly in favour of it.

Their stories and opinions were captured as focus areas based on concerns raised by Chartered Communities with quotes being used heavily throughout the report to spotlight their voices. From the engagement sessions six focus areas were identified:

- Information Sharing
- Centering our Children and our Culture
- Mistrust and Fear of MCFD
- Accountability and Credibility
- Experience with the Métis Commission

3. Key Considerations Raised by Chartered Community Leaders

3.1 Information Sharing

Current colonial approaches to privacy and information sharing, while intended to protect, can limit the collective care that Métis families, children, and youth rely on. The experiences shared above show how these systems often exclude those best positioned to help. Built without Indigenous communities in mind, they continue to prevent trusted community members from offering support grounded in relationship and cultural understanding. One Chartered Community leader highlighted how things were done in the past to support families, stating, *"When we were on the side of the road... the reason they didn't need child welfare, everybody knew everybody's business so if they [a Métis family] weren't doing well, those children moved to the next fire and they were taken care of and nurtured in the same place and organically went back when they could."* When discussing these policies a participant said *"Having designation, having a section 92 agreement where it is their [MCFD's] duty to share the information with the community representative, we need to have that. We can't reach out to people and try to help them without knowing they're there."*

Chartered Community leaders and delegates emphasized the harm caused to Métis families by the way current rules are being applied. *"The privacy concerns in my experience are often weaponized as a tool against us to avoid having real accountability. For example, having been in care if I were to put an FOI [freedom of information] request in for my own files*

which I have done the vast majority of the content is redacted...it makes it so that information, that part of our story, our history is, and tool for seeking accountability is not there." Many Indigenous Nations face urgent challenges regarding data sovereignty due to their data being withheld. Designation for MNBC will restore a measure of control to Métis people, not solely to possess that control but to apply it in support of children, youth, and families.

Questioning the unequal treatment and lack of notifications to MNBC despite its status as an Indigenous Nation, one leader asked: "*What makes us different than First Nations people? [on MNBC receiving designation]...we are recognized [as Indigenous], so why don't we have the same jurisdiction over our most precious commodity, that child in the centre.", a*nd *"I've sat down with Chiefs and told them 'I resent the fact that each of you are called if one of your children are about to be taken into care and I'm never called."* One leader summed it up by stating what we need most. *"We need access, we need understanding, and we need the ability and tools to care for our children, to bring them home and keep them home."*

Others echoed these sentiments, highlighting how difficult it is to support our children and families when left to navigate blindly or in the dark. "Unless *we have the knowledge we're just hoping we're doing the best that we can do [about supporting at risk families in their community]."*and *"How can we help our families and how can we help our kids if we don't know who they are?"* These statements only begin to convey the frustration that Métis Chartered Communities feel when trying to support Métis families and are met with colonial roadblocks.

Chartered Communities strongly support MNBC receiving designation because information sharing is a key part of their work. MNBC is committed to open communication and sharing information with Chartered Communities strictly through appropriate and established legal channels and always within the bounds of policy, not to ultimately protect the best interests of the child.

3.2 Centering our Children and our Culture

"It's time, time we brought our children home, time we brought them back into the centre of our circle."

Our children are the centre of our circle, the carriers of our culture and foundation of the Nation. *"If you lose your children, you've lost your culture, your people, your existence.* and "*We don't need the government to tell us we're a Nation, we know we're a Nation but when our children are home, I know we're a Nation."*

The first goal of Métis Nation of British Columbia Strategic Plan 2023/24 - 2026/27 includes achieving jurisdiction over our children in care for this reason. Beyond MNBC, achieving

jurisdiction over our children is of the utmost priority for Chartered Communities and our Nation as a whole. *"When you have your children back, you're a Nation."* This quote thoughtfully expressed by a participant affirms the belief of the entire Nation. Without our children, we are missing the centre of our circle.

"*We have to wrap our arms around them and take care of them, and that's what the Métis way is."* These same beliefs are what drives MNBC forward and the idea that *"We need to be putting our children above the politics...and move away from fear-based decision making and letting colonial governments tell us who we are and to really step into our rights as a self-determining Nation."*

A powerful call to action echoes from within the community. *"It's time. Its time our children got the care, the love, everything we can do for them."* More than this, it is time to move past *"The people making policies and people making choices that do not understand our culture."* The Chartered Communities have recognized the importance of MNBC as the designate for Métis families, children, and youth because of MNBC's ability to support kinship networks and ensure Métis children remain connected to their communities in a culturally safe way. *"You can have a roof over your head, you can have a foster family, or even a group home and often these are clinical settings where most of what you hear are about your deficits but it's the community where you learn love and feel that love."* Keeping Métis children in their community is one of the most important preventive measures to minimizing family involvement with the child welfare system.

Keeping children in community through kinship care is the traditional way of our ancestors. "These *are people, these are families, our flesh and blood families who are in crisis. It is my heart to surround them, but I can't surround them if I don't know who they are."* Designation for MNBC would result in more kinship care agreements and more Métis foster families. As Métis families do not know who is at-risk in their communities, they are unable to offer kinship care arrangements before it's too late unless that families chooses to disclose their situation, which can feel shameful for some. Beyond traditional kinship care, Métis foster parents are desperately needed to keep children in community. *"I can say for certainty, there are zero, absolutely zero Métis foster parents in my community so any kids are going to be sent away but if Métis families knew that are Métis children, we could foster them then maybe that would make more families step forward."* MNBC involvement will help encourage Métis families to step forward as foster parents because of the longstanding mistrust of MCFD for Indigenous people. *"If MNBC was designated, we would probably see a lot more Métis becoming Métis foster parents because they're family and we're going to take care of them."*

3.3 Accountability and Credibility

A key reason Métis Chartered Communities support MNBC as the designate is its deep-rooted accountability to the people it represents. MNBC is not just an organization, it is the Métis Nation, made up of and representing Métis people from across 39 Chartered Communities in British Columbia. This direct connection ensures that MNBC remains answerable to its communities at every level.

MNBC is grounded in democratic principles. Its board of directors and regional representatives are elected by the people, its operations are shaped through annual general meetings, and its staff often come directly from the very communities they serve. This creates not only formal accountability, but also a personal commitment to community well-being. As the designate, MNBC is committed to working together with Chartered Communities to ensure that designation is implemented effectively and transparently. Through ongoing consultation, collaboration, and communication, MNBC will uphold its responsibility to the Métis people and strengthen the Nation from the ground up.

Credibility is a primary concern for participants when it comes to MNBC. Métis people have a strong and enduring presence in British Columbia and continue to assert their voices and perspectives in spaces where recognition and validation are still being built. Gaining designation is not just a bureaucratic step; it is an assertion of Nationhood and self-determination. Designation is a necessary step toward correcting that imbalance. As one participant stated, *"Our children become more visible in the province because we're respected as a governing body."* Recognition of MNBC's authority affirms the dignity and rights of Métis families and ensures their voices are no longer sidelined but centered in decisions that affect their futures.

3.4 Mistrust and Fear of MCFD

"A lot of our families have a fear of MCFD because of the past, we're afraid to reach out for help because our children could be taken away." Indigenous people and the child welfare system have a broken relationship that is only now beginning to heal. For families already involved in the system or going to court, this can be especially frightening. Designation for MNBC will mean that at-risk families may be more likely to reach out for support before they reach the point of serious MCFD involvement, *"By us doing that, by us being there and supporting our families we're going to alleviate those fears that these families have of the system because that is a major issue that we have."* Sharing information with Chartered Communities will alert them to families that need extra support and can provide them with guidance and advocacy during any MCFD processes. Families will know that their Chartered

Community and their Nation are there to support and advocate for them. Knowing that they aren't alone in this process will hopefully help to reduce fear and mistrust.

3.5 Experience with the Métis Commission

Currently the Métis Commission is the designated representative for Métis families, children, and youth involved in the child welfare system in BC. Their job is to provide culturally safe support for Métis children involved in the child welfare and throughout court system. This includes ensuring that all Métis children have a cultural safety plan. When participants expressed their thoughts on working with the Métis Commission they said, *"In terms of children in care, the Métis Commission for children and families in my experience as a social worker are very hard to deal with.", "I have and it was the worst experience I've ever had [Speaking to having experience with the Métis Commission]* and "*I have no use for the Métis Commission."* Designation status means taking on the responsibility of caring for some of the most vulnerable members of the Métis Nation. A good working relationship with the designated representative is crucial to ensure the success of Métis families, children, and youth.

Participants brought up a disconnect between the Métis Commission and the Métis communities in BC stating, *"The Métis Commission does not know who our children are."* Another leader stated, *"I just think they're a myth, I've heard the name, but we have no interaction."* One troubling story shared how the Commission has been missing court cases involving Métis children. *"The Métis Commission doesn't show up, even in Kamloops, I'm sitting in court in Kamloops...their office is down the road, they don't come to court."*

Participants supported MNBC receiving designation over the Métis Commission because *"When they're [MNBC] designated, I know the communication is going to be there because we don't have it right now [with the Métis Commission]."* Existing relationships and communication channels between MNBC and Métis Chartered Communities ensure updates and alerts about at-risk families, children, and youth will be swiftly communicated to the community representative who will get them the support they need.

For some Métis children, youth, and families their first experience with their Métis culture may be through the Métis Commission. As participants expressed their experiences with the Métis Commission were largely negative, this does not help introduce vulnerable children, youth, and families to their Nation in a welcoming way.

4. Next Steps: Building a Métis Family Service System

A Métis Family Service System (MFSS), which is currently being developed by MNBC after a lengthy engagement period, is a structured framework that supports a coordinated approach to services for Métis children, youth, and families. Its collaborative approach

brings together Métis families, Métis Chartered Communities, Métis children and family service providers and MCFD with a common goal: to prevent Métis children, youth, and families from falling through the gaps in social services in BC. The Métis Family Service System places Métis children, youth, and families at the centre of a coordinated network of supports. The System combines regional service hubs in collaboration with service providers and a shared digital case management platform, allowing care teams to develop coordinated plans, track progress, and activate referrals when risk indicators appear. Once connected, families will move through clearly mapped pathways for youth justice, child welfare and intersecting systems. These pathways will be supported by interdisciplinary teams that include social workers, navigators, legal advocates, and Elders who walk alongside families through each stage of their journey. Through collaboration with MNBC Ministries and departments, and by aligning provincial systems with MNBC systems, we will ensure families are not left to navigate fragmented services alone. The system will also work to support fast-tracked citizenship processes so that Métis children, youth, and families can quickly access the full range of benefits and entitlements available to them. Quality assurance will be grounded in measurable service standards, real time data dashboards, and annual public reporting to identify gaps and guide future investment.

Prevention and culture will guide every program stream, with a focus on reducing the likelihood that Métis children, youth, and families become involved in crisis systems in the first place. This includes parenting programs rooted in Métis culture, regular developmental and mental health screening in early years settings, school-based wraparound supports, access to Elders and/or mentors, and youth-led programs that build belonging. Kinship care registries and customary care agreements will ensure that when intervention is unavoidable children remain within their kinship networks, and a dedicated legal support unit will help families navigate inquiries, hearings, and orders within the boundaries of jurisdiction. Land based healing camps, mobile mental health teams, and peer mentorship circles will operate alongside mainstream services, creating multiple entry points that are welcoming, safe and rooted in Métis culture. Every element of the system is bound by one purpose, which is to ensure Métis children, youth and families thrive in safe, culturally rooted environments and that families receive the right help at the right time, every time.

In a survey that asked vulnerable Métis families about their needs, barriers, and wishes for a MFSS, the primary barriers they faced in the current system were:

- Cultural Insensitivity (24)
- Limited Availability (22)
- Lack of Information (18)
- Complex Application Process (18)

For vulnerable families already involved with child welfare, these barriers to accessing support in the current system can be devastating. The MFSS will work to address these barriers and implement safeguards to protect families if they do encounter barriers. Throughout this process and the development of the MFSS framework, Chartered Communities and service providers will be consulted on best practices for addressing these barriers while maintaining an accessible and culturally safe environment.

An important aspect of the MFSS is citizenship. MNBC supports both self-identified and Métis citizens. For vulnerable and at-risk families, applying for citizenship may often not be a priority. The Children and Families Citizenship Specialist Will fast-track at-risk families, children, and youth through the citizenship process while providing support every step of the way. The Children and Families Services Manager also oversees this work and provides support when they can. However, the importance of hiring additional staff to support this work cannot be underestimated. With designation, more vulnerable families will be entering the citizenship process, emphasizing the need for extra support to ensure they can still receive the same level of care. Designation for MNBC means that the Métis Nation in BC will become stronger, as more self-identified Métis people will be guided through the citizenship process and come home to their Nation.

Designation will work seamlessly alongside the MFSS. Families involved in the child welfare system will be welcomed by their Nation and provided holistic wrap around services. Involvement in the child welfare system is traumatic for families but through designation MNBC will be able to identify those families and have them connected to culturally safe services quickly.

Conclusion

What emerged from the designation engagements was not just consensus, it was clarity. Across communities, the message was clear, which was that designation is not a bureaucratic step, but a necessary act of care for Métis children, youth and families. At the heart of every conversation was the best interest of the child, firmly rooted in the knowledge that strong, supported families prevent children from being swept into systems that were never built for them. These truths grounded each discussion and carried forward into the concerns that communities raised.

These engagements did not simply confirm the need for designation, they also made it undeniable. Community leaders spoke to the challenges they face when they do not know who needs help. They described what it feels like to be walking in the dark, unable to act unless a family is already within reach. This is where so many fall through the cracks, not

because of a lack of will, but because of a lack of access. The absence of clear pathways leaves communities trying to respond without the tools or information they need, reinforcing why designation matters.

Amid these realities, one truth stands out. The Chartered Communities have determined that MNBC is the right body to carry this responsibility. MNBC has the capacity, resources, and trust of the people. It is not only the logical choice, but also the collective choice. This shared decision across communities strengthens the call for action and reflects a united direction forward.

Looking ahead, designation is not the finish line but where we begin. From here, the focus turns to building the systems and supports our children, youth, and families deserve. A system that will ensure Métis children, youth, and families are never left without the support or the connection they need. These next steps are guided by what Chartered Communities have already said clearly and consistently throughout this process.

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