

Giganawenimaanaanig (We All take care of them-(Ojibwe)

# Red Dress Alert

Submission to Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Giganawenimaanaanig

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## Introduction:

The primary objective of instituting a Red Dress Alert is to promptly notify the public when an Indigenous woman, girl, or 2SLGBTQIA+ person is reported missing, thereby galvanizing collective efforts to promptly locate them and secure their safe return.

## Pre-engagement Sessions:

In pursuance of preliminary feedback on the Red Dress Alert, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) organized sixteen pre-engagement sessions spanning from December 2023 to January 2024. These sessions, chaired by distinguished figures such as Hilda Anderson-Pyrz, Chair of the National Family and Survivor's Circle Inc., Sandra DeLaronde, Chair of Giganawenimaanaanig (MMIWG Implementation Committee), and Members of Parliament Leah Gazan and Pam Damoff, were intended to solicit input from Indigenous grassroots and distinctions-based organizations nationwide concerning the potential implementation of a Red Dress Alert.

Participation in the pre-engagement sessions from Manitoba encompassed community organizations, both urban and northern, distinctions-based representative political entities, family members, survivors, and frontline workers.

## Discussion Focus:

Participants were invited to contribute practical insights on various facets of the Red Dress Alert, addressing inquiries related to envisioned objectives, potential hurdles, criteria development, and potential models derived from existing mechanisms. Central discussions underscored the pivotal role of the Red Dress Alert in fortifying community safety, furnishing comprehensive support to victims of violence, and fostering public awareness regarding the enduring crisis confronting MMIWG2S+ individuals.

## Concerns and Considerations:

While recognizing the potential of a Red Dress Alert to heighten public awareness, participants articulated apprehensions regarding the inadvertent reinforcement of detrimental attitudes and heightened risks confronting Indigenous communities should the alert system be excessively automated and widespread. To mitigate these risks, participants emphasized the imperative of accompanying the alert's introduction with a comprehensive public education campaign, alongside robust safeguards against predatory exploitation and judicious data management.

Measures must be devised to engender public endorsement of a system designed to shield and safeguard Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirited individuals, a process that may not invariably unfold seamlessly. Additionally, mechanisms must be established to facilitate secure connections or conversations for individuals who prefer not to be located.

## Inclusivity and Naming:

Acknowledging the significance of inclusivity, participants recommended a thorough examination of the alert's nomenclature to ensure its embracement of language and symbols inclusive of all demographics, encompassing individuals from the 2SLGBTQI+ community. While the Red Dress symbol bears cultural significance for many, deliberations underscored the necessity of consulting

Indigenous communities to explore alternative appellations or symbols that resonate more universally. However, participants emphasized that while the naming process is pivotal, it should not impede expedited efforts to formulate and implement the alert system.

#### Opportunity in Manitoba:

Given Manitoba's enduring acknowledgment as the epicenter of MMIWG2S+ issues, an unparalleled opportunity exists to enact efficacious prevention and intervention measures through the customization of an alert system. Capitalizing on the success of the Education Day convened by Giganawenimaanaanig in October 2023, which garnered advocacy for the alerting system, Manitoba can spearhead a collaborative endeavor involving family members, survivors, communities, and governmental and law enforcement entities to devise a comprehensive, Manitoba-centric solution.

#### Recommendations:

A Red Dress Alert System must be led by Indigenous women that are independent and separate from representative Indigenous political organizations. It must be a safe place where Indigenous women can feel and are safe. There must be an understanding of trauma informed support that is particular to working with Indigenous women and gender-diverse relatives that have been impacted by intimate partner violence in particular and all forms of violence that impact how we live in the world.

The implementation of the Red Dress Alert in Manitoba should be steered by a structured work plan, informed by prior extensive consultation processes. This plan should encompass diverse facets, including system administration, operational protocols, communication strategies tailored to urban, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities, as well as comprehensive support services for families and victims. The work plan should also evaluate the viability of a hybrid approach integrating on-the-ground initiatives with technological support. Furthermore, a financing strategy should be formulated to ensure the sustainability and efficacy of the alert system.

#### Conclusion:

The institution of a Red Dress Alert System will address Calls to Justice in acknowledgment of the pressing need to confront the crisis confronting MMIWG2S+ individuals. Manitoba stands poised to lead by example in the development and implementation of a Red Dress Alert system that prioritizes inclusivity, community engagement, and collaborative action. As Minister Fontaine articulated on February 8, 2024, "I believe that there is substantial work yet to be undertaken." Through concerted endeavors and strategic partnerships, we can envisage a future wherein Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals are shielded and supported, guaranteeing their safety and well-being today and reshaping the narrative for forthcoming generations.

About Giganawenimaanaanig:

"Giganawenimaanaanig is a provincial consortium comprising affected family members, non-profit agencies, service providers, Indigenous political organizations, and governmental bodies dedicated to continuous policy development and implementation. Our focus includes informing legislative frameworks, advocating for justice, perpetuating ongoing education, and fostering awareness of the 231 Calls to Justice outlined in the 'Reclaiming Power and Place – Final Report National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.'

Our work is deeply rooted in Indigenous cultural ceremonies and traditions, embracing a matriarchal paradigm of knowledge, cultural customs, and lived experiences. We operate through an Indigenous gender-centric lens, emphasizing understanding, existence, and action."