

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES**

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Hon. Brad Duguid: I rise today to speak about Jordan's Principle, but before I begin I want to take a moment to acknowledge some very important guests that are here with us today, people who have worked very hard to ensure that this day was possible and people who have lent their support to this very important initiative. I hope I have them all because there are a number of guests here.

We have with us Grand Chief Stan Beardy from NAN; Grand Chief Timothy Thompson, Mohawks of Akwesasne; Chief Donald Maracle from Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte; and Chief Arthur Moore, Constance Lake First Nation. We have a number of representatives from Chiefs of Ontario; I thank them for coming. There are representatives from the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies. We have Sylvia Maracle, somebody who is known to all of us, executive director, and Sheila McMahon, president of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. We have, from the Ontario Native Women's Association, Dawn Harvard, and her beautiful daughter Briana is here with us. Marianne Borg, I believe, is here as well. And we have some representatives from the government of Canada. I thank them all for joining us here today and I thank them for their hard work in this area.

I would like also to acknowledge that I'm speaking on behalf of the government of Ontario here today and many of my respected colleagues. I would like to thank the Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services; the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services; and the Honourable David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, for their support and assistance with this important initiative; and my parliamentary assistant, Jeff Leal, as well for his help.

Jordan Anderson, for whom this principle is named, was born on a northern Manitoba reserve in 1999 with a complex disorder requiring special care. When Jordan died at age four, he'd spent his entire life in a hospital far from his family's community because the province of Manitoba and the government of Canada argued over who should pay for his care. In a nation as wealthy as Canada, no child should experience what young Jordan Anderson did, nor should any family in Canada be presented with such heart-wrenching choices as the Andersons were.

The McGuinty government believes that today's children are tomorrow's leaders, which is why this government invests heavily in the health, safety and well-being of all Ontario children. We are a leader in providing seamless services for children. In Ontario we take an inclusive approach, putting patient care ahead of jurisdictional issues, and apply this principle when children like Jordan need help. This government believes that children's health, safety and well-being must always take precedence over matters of jurisdiction. That's important. It's time that we specifically acknowledge that a child-first policy is the only appropriate way to manage complex care cases in Canada.

Jordan's principle puts the needs of children first and supports the notion that needed health care should not be delayed or disrupted because of jurisdictional disputes. Ontario fully supports Jordan's Principle and pledges to work with First Nations and the federal government to ensure Jordan's Principle is honoured and applied in the province of Ontario. Providing aboriginal children with the opportunity to reach their full potential is one of the reasons that the McGuinty government created the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Ontario's Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

Ontario, in partnership with First Nations, Metis and Inuit, is working hard to improve the quality of life for aboriginal peoples. We invest about \$600 million annually on programs and services for aboriginal people; about \$300 million of this essential funding goes to aboriginal child and social services. We invest in the Aboriginal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, which is designed to help all aboriginal children in Ontario get the best start in life. We also contribute funding to the aboriginal health access centres, through the aboriginal healing and wellness strategy, known as AHWS, which funds more than 460 health, healing and anti-violence programs in aboriginal communities both on and off reserve, improving the lives and health of people and communities.

Today I am affirming this government's commitment to Jordan's Principle, a commitment by the government of Ontario to ensure it is honoured and applied in this province. This government promises to work with First Nation families, communities and the federal government to make certain that jurisdictional disputes do not prevent the timely provision of health and social services for First Nation children in Ontario.

While Jordan's Principle is about equal treatment by governments, the spirit of this principle should be understood and considered by all public servants in all ministries in every government in this country.

I'm committed to working with my colleagues in other ministries to ensure equal treatment and access across all the programs and services we provide, with the full participation and involvement of our First Nation, Metis and Inuit partners. Aboriginal children and youth should have access to the same quality of services that all Ontarians receive. They should have access to the same opportunities and choices available to each and every one of us.

Before I close, I'd like to acknowledge and thank many of the people who supported and stood behind Jordan and his family. Because of their efforts, much will be accomplished. Jordan Anderson will be forever remembered and honoured. Future complex care cases of First Nation children will be treated with the compassion and dignity they deserve, and Ontario will ensure that aboriginal children will not have needed care delayed as a result of jurisdictional disputes.