

Published | Publi : 2019-06-21 06:00 (EST)
Received | Re u: 2019-06-21 05:15 (EST)

Winnipeg Free Press

Winnipeg Free Press.com

Senate OKs Indigenous child-welfare reform

Dylan Robertson

OTTAWA - Parliament has passed the Liberal government's landmark child-welfare reform, despite Manitoba groups complaining the bill lacks data-sharing requirements Indigenous groups need in order to take over Child and Family Services.

"The bill has caused much anguish to me, and it also has created division among Indigenous people," Manitoba Sen. Mary Jane McCallum told her colleagues, moments before the Senate passed Bill C-92.

The legislation creates a pathway for First Nations, Inuit and M tis groups to negotiate the handover of child welfare from their respective provinces and territories. If they can't reach a deal over the course of a year, Ottawa can step over provinces and territories to enact jurisdiction for Indigenous groups over their children.

Indigenous groups co-authored the bill. Some advocates have praised it for taking the legacy of residential schools and making CFS a tool of empowerment, while others say the bill lacks concrete funding commitments.

McCallum revealed Thursday that Bill C-92 also doesn't force provinces and territories to hand over historical data, such as how many children have been in care and what various programs have cost. She fears that if Ottawa "cannot enter into the provincial arena and force them to co-operate," regions such as Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan won't help out.

Federal officials confirmed the bill can only compel provinces and territories to provide data from the point at which negotiations start. Otherwise, it's up to the goodwill of the provinces and territories to hand over information.

McCallum said the issue has been a concern for groups such as the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which worries its own proposed legislation won't be compatible with Bill C-92, despite federal officials insisting it would be.

Assembly Grand Chief Arlen Dumas also said he had concerns about an ongoing audit of the federal CFS program, as its existence was not publicly disclosed.

Dumas said he'd heard the Liberals had ordered the audit be shelved in order to pass Bill C-92; federal sources instead claimed it was extended in order for CFS agencies to provide information. The auditor general didn't reply to a request for clarity.

Manitoba leads the country in child apprehensions; 87 per cent of foster children are Indigenous.

Bill C-92 will likely get royal assent later this month and become law.

dylan.robertson@freepress.mb.ca

Url: <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/senate-oks-indigenous-child-welfare-reform-511612622.html>