



**OFIFC**

Ontario Federation of  
Indigenous Friendship Centres

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A Response to Proposed New Regulations under the  
*Missing Persons Act, 2018*

April 2019

## About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Founded in 1971, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) works to support, advocate for, and build the capacity of member Friendship Centres across Ontario.

Emerging from a nation-wide, grass-roots movement dating back to the 50's, Friendship Centres are community hubs where Indigenous people living in towns, cities, and urban centres can access culturally-based and culturally-appropriate programs and services every day. Today, Friendship Centres are dynamic hubs of economic and social convergence that create space for Indigenous communities to thrive. Friendship Centres are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

In Ontario more than 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban communities. The OFIFC is the largest urban Indigenous service network in the province supporting this vibrant, diverse, and quickly-growing population through programs and initiatives that span justice, health, family support, long-term care, healing and wellness, employment and training, education, research, and more.

Friendship Centres receive their mandate from their communities, and they are inclusive of all Indigenous people – First Nation, Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit, and those who self-identify as Indigenous.

## Introduction

On January 26-27, 2017, the Ministry of Community and Safety and Correctional Services hosted an engagement session with Friendship Centres to consult on the province's forthcoming Strategy for a Safer Ontario and Ontario's response to missing persons. The engagement brought together key informants from Friendship Centres who are knowledgeable about community safety planning and community policing. Drawing from the recommendations provided by Friendship Centres, the OFIFC would like to offer the following comments on the proposed regulations under the *Missing Persons Act, 2018*.

## Analysis of Proposed New Regulations under the *Missing Persons Act, 2018*.

The OFIFC recognises that the preamble of the *Act* acknowledges the role that colonialism, sexism, and racism may have in exacerbating the risk of an individual becoming a missing person. While acknowledgment is important, it is necessary for the government to demonstrate that it is willing to implement institutional reform to ensure that these root causes are effectively addressed. The vulnerability of Indigenous women and youth is driven by systemic racism and discrimination. It is important to create regulations for the *Act* that involve trusted community-based Indigenous organisations,

for cases of missing Indigenous persons. For example, Friendship Centres have a different relationship with community members than police services and other agencies and are able to incorporate traditional healing supports as part of a missing person strategy. For missing Indigenous people, the approaches need to include traditional supports offered alongside clinicians and mainstream specialists. It is time for Indigenous-specific policies that require police services to engage with Friendship Centres and other Indigenous organisations when servicing vulnerable populations. Indigenous community organisations must be involved in the design and development of community safety planning processes from their inception.

Friendship Centres and the OFIFC have called on the government for increased transparency including sharing quantitative information in a timely manner. As society comes to depend on and expect quantifiable measurement of indicators of social wellbeing from government, and as government commits to the delivery of effective services, the need to quantify, track, and improve upon statistics is paramount. Meaningful, measurable data and information should be treated as an open, public asset and be used to inform public policy decision-making. As such, the OFIFC recommends that a regulation be included to operationalise s. 5(9)(c) with regards to collecting data of the missing person subject of an urgent demand order. It is critical that this *Act* works not only to improve the effectiveness of missing persons investigations but also informs statistics on disaggregated race-based data, gender identity and residency. Collecting this information will assist government and community service providers understand how best to direct programming and public policy efforts to address the issue of missing persons. Relatedly, this collected data should also be included in the Annual Report provided for in s. 8 of the *Act* to ensure accountability and transparency of statistics of missing persons investigations.

For many Indigenous communities and organisations, the opportunity to receive regular updates from police services is critically important in increasing transparency and building trust in community. It is necessary for the Annual Report described in s. 8 to include the outcomes for missing person cases, particularly Indigenous women and youth. The public must be able to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the *Act* and the regulations in addressing missing persons cases. It is important for the Minister of the Solicitor General and the public to monitor the outcomes for racialised communities including Indigenous women and youth, as related to the number requests for urgent demands for missing persons.

In order for the police service to appropriately address Indigenous missing person's cases it is necessary that they understand the risk factors indicated in the preamble of the *Act*. During the Friendship Centre engagement session, community members explained the tumultuous and paternalistic relationship that Indigenous people have with law enforcement in Ontario. Therefore, as described in the recently passed *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act, 2019*:

Increase support for front-line police officers by mandating human rights, systemic racism, diversity and Indigenous training for new police officers, special constables and Police Service Board members.<sup>1</sup>

The OFIFC is supportive of this mandated training and advocates for the requirement of police services to have ongoing Indigenous cultural competency training that is designed and delivered by Indigenous communities and organisations. It is the OFIFC's perspective that Indigenous cultural competency training must be uniform across the province, mandated within every level of the Ministry of Solicitor General and front-line ministerial services, and meet standards that are set in collaboration with Indigenous partners. Indigenous cultural competency should be made a goal of community safety planning and wellbeing processes.

## Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

Criminal justice reforms and further amendments to the proposed regulations under the *Missing Persons Act, 2018* are required to make a marked difference for Indigenous women and youth who are disproportionately vulnerable to becoming missing persons. It is important to involve trusted community-based Indigenous organisations, for cases of missing Indigenous persons, as Friendship Centres have a different relationship with community members than police services. Friendship Centre, as vital community spaces, respond to the needs of community members through offering programming in the areas children and youth, healing and wellness, employment and training, health and justice. Friendship Centre staff gain respect in community as they build relationships and are directly involved in community safety responses. Therefore, the OFIFC provides the following specific amendments to the proposed regulations:

The OFIFC recommends that the provincial government:

1. Develop Indigenous-specific regulations that involve Friendship Centres and other Indigenous organisations in the design and development of community safety planning processes from their inception. Friendship Centres are able to incorporate traditional healing supports as part of a missing person strategy.
2. Increase transparency and police connections with urban Indigenous communities through releasing residency, race-and identity-based data to understand how best to direct programming and public policy efforts to address the issue of missing persons.
3. Publish the number of urgent demands for records, specifically as it relates to racialised communities, Indigenous women and youth and the outcomes of these cases.
4. Mandate Indigenous cultural competency training to be delivered in-person by a reputable Indigenous organisation, be trauma-informed, provide historical context about colonisation, and be progressive in nature—offered regularly and building upon previous trainings.

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<sup>1</sup> *Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act, 2019*. Retrieved from: [https://www.ola.org/sites/default/files/node-files/bill/document/pdf/2019/2019-03/b068ra\\_e.pdf](https://www.ola.org/sites/default/files/node-files/bill/document/pdf/2019/2019-03/b068ra_e.pdf)