

Title: "Policy Matters: Cindy Blackstock"

Author: Cindy Blackstock

Published in: *The Philanthropist*, Policy Matters

ISSN 2562-1491

Date: April 15, 2019

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2019/04/policy-matters-cindy-blackstock/>

Date of PDF Download: May 24, 2019

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By Cindy Blackstock

Later this year, Canadians will vote in the 43rd federal election. Many non-profit organizations, networks, and coalitions see elections as a critical opportunity to raise relevant public policy issues. Recently, the rules for charities engaging in public policy have become a prominent source of debate and discussion in government and the sector. As we countdown to the next election, The Philanthropist will be asking non-profit leaders what public policy issues are top of mind for them.

Name and organization: Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

What current election issues might impact your work?

The Caring Society is deeply concerned about the ongoing gaps and inequities in services for First Nations children and families. Candidates need to commit to providing equitable access to basics like clean water, safe housing, and properly-funded schools so that First Nations kids have a fair chance to grow up safely at home, get a good education, be healthy, and feel proud of who they are.

In November, the federal government announced a new piece of Indigenous child welfare legislation. We need to make sure the legislation affirms First Nations jurisdiction, is properly resourced, responds to distinct community needs, and builds on the longstanding community efforts to promote healthy families so they can safely care for their children.

What issues would you like to bring more attention to in the election?

In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found Canada to be racially discriminating against more than 163,000 First Nations children in its provision of child and family services and its implementation of Jordan's Principle. Canada has yet to fully comply with the Tribunal's orders.

In response, the Caring Society's "Spirit Bear Plan to End Inequalities in Public Services for First Nations Children, Youth and Families" calls on the federal government to: fully comply with Tribunal rulings; have the Parliamentary Budget Officer publicly cost out shortfalls in federally-funded services provided to First Nations; evaluate government departments to identify discriminatory policies and practices; and offer mandatory training for all public servants.

Where can we learn more about these issues?

The Spirit Bear Plan is available online at fncaringsociety.com/SpiritBear.

Read the ruling from the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and learn more about the case at fnwitness.ca

Learn more about equity for First Nations children and families through our Indigenous Knowledge Portal at fncaringsociety.com.