

July 8, 2021

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria
President of the Treasury Board
Room 4320, 99 Wellesley St. W.
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1W3

Hon. Monte McNaughton
Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development
14th Floor, 400 University Ave.
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7

Re: establishing a provincial holiday in honour of truth and reconciliation

Dear Ministers:

At OPSEU/SEFPO, we proudly stand in solidarity with Indigenous members and communities across Turtle Island in the pursuit of justice. We join them in their call to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and we urge you to recognize this day by establishing a provincial holiday.

As you know, the federal government recently passed a bill creating a national holiday to commemorate the legacy of Canada's residential school system, and to ensure that our tragic history is never forgotten. As such, a new statutory holiday will be observed on September 30 for employees in federally regulated workplaces.

This noteworthy date coincides with Orange Shirt Day in honour of the Indigenous children taken from their homes and forced to attend residential school – many of whom never returned.

Like so many Ontarians, we at OPSEU/SEFPO are sickened by the recent discovery of mass graves near the sites of several former residential schools, albeit not surprised. We know that many more are yet to be found, likely at sites in Ontario. In light of these discoveries, and in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation, we must take pause to honour the victims, the survivors, their families and communities.

We must recognize all 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including their recommendation to establish a statutory holiday as a time for solemn reflection and public commemoration. This remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

Reconciling with Indigenous communities is our shared responsibility. It is our duty to listen and to act, and for this reason, OPSEU/SEFPO will commemorate the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation by establishing its own staff holiday on September 30. As always, we are proud to lead by example, and we encourage you to do the same; to make Ontario the first to adopt this statutory holiday provincially.

This may be a small step, but it's an important step toward reconciliation and justice for Indigenous peoples.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Warren Thomas", written over a light blue background.

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President, OPSEU/SEFPO