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Legislative Assembly of Nunavut



Nunavut Maligaliurvia
Assemblée législative du Nunavut

March 14, 2016

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Mar 16/16

Mr. James Eetoolook
Vice-President
Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
P.O. Box 638
Iqaluit, Nunavut
X0A 0H0

Dear Vice-President Eetoolook:

I hope that this correspondence finds you well and that your deliberations this week in Gjoa Haven are productive.

As you know, I resigned from Cabinet concerning the issue of the government's decision to open a store in Iqaluit for the purpose of selling alcoholic beverages, despite the lack of appropriate facilities and programs in our territory to address substance abuse and addictions.

As you are very much aware, Article 32 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* provides in part that:

"... Inuit have the right as set out in this article to participate in the development of social and cultural policies ... within the Nunavut Settlement Area."

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated's 2013-2014 *Annual Report on the State of Inuit Culture and Society* focused on the justice system in Nunavut. Your report noted in part that:

"... the lack of consistent access to mental health services in communities can lead some people to self-medicate through alcohol and substance abuse. Addictions increase the likelihood that people will enter the criminal justice system, where they are unlikely to receive the care they need. This lack of consistent access to care is often compounded by the fact that many people whose sentences have ended return to the same stressful, psychologically or physically harmful environments, and eventually re-offend ..."

I am confident that you will agree that substance abuse and addiction has had a devastating impact on our society, as evidenced by the shockingly high rates of violent crime and incarceration in Nunavut.

I am also confident that you will agree that the government has a clear obligation under Article 32 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement* to hold formal and meaningful consultations with Inuit prior to taking any decision that will clearly have a significant impact on our society.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that such consultations have actually taken place.

I have committed to serving our territory in whatever capacity I can. As part of this commitment, please be assured of my firm and forceful support for action on the part of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated to ensure that the government adheres to its Article 32 obligations in this matter and suspends its plan to open a store for the sale of alcoholic beverages.

I am very much open to participating in any meetings or discussions that you or your staff may wish to have on this very important issue.

I am pleased to conclude by noting that I will be tabling copies of both my correspondence and your reply in the Legislative Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PO' followed by a flourish.

Paul Okalik, MLA
Iqaluit-Sinaa