

## **Minute for Reconciliation – Bear Witness Day (Short Version)**

Jordan River Anderson was born on October 22, 1999 with complex medical needs and had to remain in hospital in Winnipeg. Jordan's family lives in Norway House Cree Nation, 800km from Winnipeg.

When Jordan was three years old, his doctors let his family know that he could go home with them, provided he had at-home care. The federal government and Manitoba provincial government could not agree on who would pay for his at-home care.

Because the government could not agree, Jordan was never able to experience living in a loving family home because of the deep systemic barriers preventing First Nations children from accessing needed services and supports. Jordan died in hospital, in January 2005, at the age of five. Jordan's death ignited a movement to uphold human rights for all First Nations children.

In February 2006, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, recommended that a child first principle be adopted in the resolution of inter-governmental jurisdictional disputes. Under this procedure the government (provincial or federal) that first receives a request to pay for services for a Status Indian child where that service is available to other children, the government will pay for the service without delay or disruption. The paying party then has the option to refer the matter to a jurisdictional dispute resolution table. In this way the rights of the child come first whilst still allowing for the resolution of jurisdictional issues. In honor and memory of Jordan it is recommended the child first principle to resolving jurisdictional disputes be termed Jordan's principle and be implemented without delay.

The House of Commons unanimously passed a motion in 2007 supporting Jordan's Principle.

On May 10, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal issued its first non-compliance order against the Canadian government for failing to implement Jordan's Principle. Following this landmark legal ruling, Bear Witness Day on May 10 was established. Ten years later, in February 2026, the Canadian Senate formally recognized Bear Witness Day as a National Day of Action.

Jordan's favorite toy was his teddy bear so the logo for Jordan's Principle is a blue teddy bear. Canadians are encouraged to carry a Teddy Bear with them on Bear Witness Day as a conversation starter to share awareness. Here in Regina, Regina Native Outreach Ministry, is requesting that you donate a Teddy Bear to their Mother and Baby Welcome Bag project. You can leave the Teddy Bear at any Regina United Church and they will contact Regina Native Outreach Ministry.

Bear Witness Day is to remind us that Jordan's Principle is more than a policy – it is a powerful expression of children's inherent human rights. Honouring Jordan's Principle and the memory of Jordan River Anderson means confronting the legacy of colonialism and working actively to ensure fairness and equity for First Nations children who deserve nothing less than the full protection of their rights.

Jordan's Principle provides comprehensive, free support for First Nations children (on or off-reserve) to ensure equitable access to health, social, and educational services without delays due to jurisdictional disputes.

Although Jordan's Principle has been in existence since 2007, nineteen years, it is by no means running smoothly. There is a significant backlog of requests, the rejection rate for requests is increasing year by year and the federal government's financial allocation for Jordan's Principle in 2026 is less than what is needed.

How can you support Jordan's Principle?

You can raise awareness by educating others about the principle. That includes Indigenous people, although the principle has been in effect for several years, don't assume that people know about it or understand what it is for.

You can provide support and assist Indigenous families with submitting a request to Jordan's Principle.

Communities or organizations can submit group requests to support multiple children with shared needs, such as school-based programs or community health initiatives. If you know of group that could be eligible, you should suggest that they submit a request to Jordan's Principle.

This information was compiled by Regina Native Outreach Ministry, a ministry within the United Church of Canada. If you would like more information, please email [reginanativeoutreachministry@gmail.com](mailto:reginanativeoutreachministry@gmail.com).