

Date: _____

To: The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, MP, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs

cc. The Honourable _____, MP for _____

Re. Pikangikum

Dear Minister Bennett:

I am writing to you out of deep concern over the abysmal conditions in the First Nations community of Pikangikum, in Northern Ontario. In this remote community of over 2400 people, fewer than 10% of the households have access to clean running water and indoor plumbing. The community is also not connected to the electrical grid and relies on diesel generators to produce electrical power. Not only is this expensive—a 2011 report noted that the cost of power from the generator is over \$3.5 million annually—but when these generators fail, as happened this past month when the main generator was leaking fuel, the community is left without power. When lengthy power outages occur, teachers and vulnerable people in the community must be evacuated, creating gaps in the children’s access to education. Pikangikum has also been known for its high suicide rate. Chief Paddy Peters was hoping that 2015 would be a suicide-free year—yet tragically, within the first month of this year three young people in the community took their own lives. The desperation these young people feel reflects the desperate circumstances in which they live.

In 2007, then federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Jim Prentice promised an investment of \$46 million to upgrade Pikangikum’s school, install running water and connect the community to the power grid. This promise has not been delivered. While construction has started on the new school, it will not be complete until 2016 at the earliest, and the water and power infrastructure problems persist.

In 2011 a group of professional volunteers formed the Pikangikum Working Group to deliver indoor plumbing to the community. Meanwhile, concerned Anglicans and Lutherans began to raise awareness of the situation in Pikangikum and collect donations to the water project, through the Pimatisiwin Nipi (Living Water) group and the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund. With the help of the Frontiers Foundation and the Pikangikum First Nation itself, these efforts have delivered running water to fourteen houses so far, and money is already available to equip more houses. However, the existing diesel generators are inadequate to handle the burden of additional pumps and water heaters. The cost of power through the provincial grid would be approximately one-tenth of the cost of diesel-generated power, but the community

needs the approval of both federal and provincial governments to connect it to the grid. Until the power infrastructure issue is resolved, the water project is on hold.

As one of the people who has committed to support the community of Pikangikum through Pimatisiwin Nipi, the PWRDF, and the Pikangikum Working Group, I share their frustration at the delays and inaction that have left this community in harmful conditions for years despite recommendations and promises of investment in basic infrastructure. Concerned Anglicans and Lutherans are doing our part to address these problems, but we can only go so far. Both levels of government to do their part.

I ask both federal and provincial governments to commit to facilitating the connection of the community of Pikangikum with the provincial power grid. This will allow the planned plumbing installations to go ahead and improve the operation of the new school, while delivering power at a fraction of the cost. We urge you to make this a priority for both your governments. The people of Pikangikum have waited long enough.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,