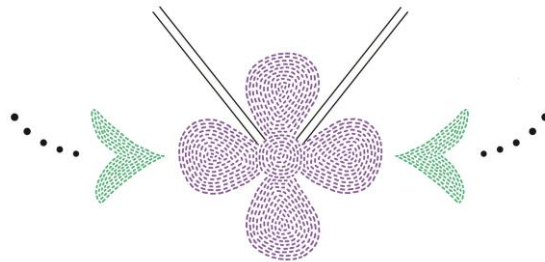


National Inquiry into
Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale
sur les femmes et les filles
autochtones disparues et assassinées

**National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
Truth-Gathering Process
Part 1 Statement Gathering
Prince George, British Columbia
Prince George Native Friendship Centre**



PUBLIC

Wednesday October 3, 2018

**Statement - Volume 497
Barbara “Barb” Ward-Burkitt**

Statement gathered by Kerrie Reay

ROYAL REPORTING SERVICES LTD.
#300-2010 11th Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 0J3
E-mail: info@royalreporting.com – Phone: 1-800-667-6777

II

NOTE

Where not required by other statute, redactions to this public transcript have been made pursuant to Rule 55 of the Commission's *Legal Path: Rules of Respectful Practice*, which provides for "the discretion to redact private information of a sensitive nature where it is not material to the evidence to be given before distributing the information to the Parties. The National Inquiry will consider the public interest in releasing this type of information against the potential harmful impact on the individual whose personal information is at issue."

III

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement - Volume 497	
October 3, 2018	PAGE
Witness: Barbara Ward-Burkitt	
Testimony of Barbara Ward-Burkitt	1
Reporter's certification	14
Statement gatherer: Kerrie Reay	
Documents submitted with testimony: none.	

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

--- Upon convening October 3, 2018 at 11:32 p.m.

MS. KERRIE REAY: And so just for the record, Kerrie Reay as the statement taker is with Barbara Ward-Burkitt. [*Registrar's note: informed consent discussed omitted*]. So, Barb, please, when you're ready.

MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT: Thank you.

MS. KERRIE REAY: So I'm just going to move this back a bit, or if you could just slide back a bit. There we go, excellent. All right, Barb, when you're ready.

MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT: So, yeah, so I'm -- I'm sharing these recommendations in the capacity of my own personal journey as an Indigenous woman. As a very, very proud Cree woman. Not only as Barb Ward-Burkitt, but as *Wahiyow Cawapata Scoo*, and all that that means, and also as -- as my journey has evolved, and I'm now the executive director of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, which is the largest Friendship Centre in Canada. And so, you know, the role is -- is -- is -- is really important to me and -- and that journey that I've made.

And -- and my recommendation is that, you know, we do everything in our power collectively, you know, as women and as an Indigenous people and as government to ensure that everybody can have the same kind of journey

1 that I've had. You know, we don't want women to have to go
2 through domestic violence, and all of those things, and
3 family breakup, but -- breakdown, but for those that have,
4 that we put things in place so that they can have those
5 opportunities to sometime get to the place where they can
6 succeed in whichever way that means for them.

7 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

8 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so what are
9 all of those things that we need to be aware of and to put
10 in place for that to happen? And for that journey to not
11 be as challenging perhaps as it was for me.

12 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

13 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** So, you know, we
14 need to look at those institutions that are out there, and
15 how can we work with those institutions to better support
16 our women, right, so that our women are safe.

17 When they are trying to get out of a
18 relationship that's not safe for their children, how can we
19 put everything that we need to -- to -- in place for them
20 to be able to do that? So that they can continue to be a
21 part of their community. So that they can improve
22 themselves in whichever way they define.

23 If they say that's what they need to do, that
24 should be good enough, they shouldn't have to defend that
25 to everybody in the world. That is not okay. So whatever

1 it is that they need and the supports that they need to
2 ensure that the safekeeping of their children is happening
3 during that period of time, is really, really important.

4 So, you know, I know from my experience I
5 wanted so badly to finish my grade 12 and yet those
6 supports weren't out there for me to do that in a seamless
7 way. I had -- it was a challenge.

8 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

9 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** By God, I did it
10 anyways, right. And for most of us, that's really what
11 it's about. We have that internal desire to take -- to do
12 what we can to take care of our children, so that needs to
13 happen.

14 And I think that some of those changes need
15 to happen through legislation. So I know that when
16 legislation changed and the RCMP were then the ones that
17 were making the decisions about laying charges, and that
18 was taken out of the hands of those vulnerable women, that
19 that made a big difference. So I think that having things
20 legislated is really, really important as much as possible.
21 So, you know, those are -- are some really important
22 things. To have RCMP, you know, they've -- they've come a
23 ways, but there's still so much work to do.

24 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

25 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** You know, there's

1 -- yeah, like, you know, we talk about reconciliation. I
2 think that as Indigenous people we always have been in
3 reconciliation. That's what we've been doing the whole
4 time.

5 But now how do these other entities do that?
6 How do the -- the RCMP be in reconciliation with us as
7 Indigenous people? How do school districts do that? How
8 do municipalities do that? How do the provincial
9 government? It's really critically important.

10 And do I have the magic bullet that says you
11 do it like this? No, I don't. But I do know that it's so
12 critically important.

13 So, you know, that it's got to be taken away
14 from -- from it being our responsibility and to say, you
15 know, we still hear in our community, where I live at, "Why
16 don't those Natives just get over it?"

17 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

18 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so how do we
19 move away from that? Because it's not -- you know, just
20 when you think that you should get over it, you're hit with
21 something else. And you go back to the way things were.
22 So I think that those are really, really important pieces.

23 I think a lot more work needs to be done in
24 the school district, so that we're working with children at
25 a really, really young age. You know, that's what we do in

1 our family with our little children, we talk to them about
2 culture. They all have their name. They know what that
3 name means. They -- we talk to them about addictions, and
4 we don't do it in an ugly way. But we do it in a way that
5 they know about it. You know, "Mommy and daddy are really
6 sick right now. And they need to get better and that's why
7 you're not living with them right now." So that they've got
8 something to hold on to.

9 My little grandson, who's 9 now, we talk to
10 him about violence against women and children. So I was
11 wearing the Moose Hide pin and he --

12 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

13 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** -- and he was
14 wondering what that was. And so I was telling him that,
15 and so was his Uncle Paul (ph) who founded it. And so we
16 got a phone call from the school one day, that's why it's
17 so important in school, why I'm telling this story. And he
18 was in the first grade. And the principal said to me,
19 "Barb, do you mind if [Son] talks to the students at the
20 assembly on Friday?" And she told me the story about how a
21 little boy in class was asking, he wears his Moose Hide
22 patch, and [Son] said to him, "My Uncle Paul said I have to
23 wear this because it's rude to be mean to girls."

24 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Oh.

25 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so we got

1 called in to the school for the assembly, and this little
2 boy, only 6 years old, stood up in front of the whole
3 school and he talked about that, and the importance of
4 that. And so it's so important that we start with our
5 young kids.

6 And the school district has some work to do
7 around that, to make sure that those conversations happen.
8 That they happen in a way where it's not around trauma and,
9 you know, all those things where it's just -- he just
10 naturally stood up there and talked about that. And isn't
11 that what we want? So that it's a part of that and it's
12 not about blaming or any of those things. So that would be
13 my recommendation.

14 The other thing that's happening in British
15 Columbia that I think should happen across the country is
16 that there's a Minister's advisory council on Indigenous
17 women. And it's a part of the Ministry of Indigenous
18 Relations and Reconciliation, and it's made up of ten
19 Indigenous women. One of the representatives is an Elder
20 and one is a youth. And that council sits with the
21 Minister and provides advice to government on making
22 legislative changes so that women can be safe in our
23 province, and I know about that because I'm the co-chair.

24 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Oh.

25 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And I think that

1 if every province had that, where the voices of women can
2 be brought to a provincial level, where our voices are
3 raised, and we can talk about the things that are happening
4 at a community level with government, that's going to lead
5 to changes legislatively.

6 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

7 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** So, you know, I
8 think any opportunities that there are out there for women
9 to be raised up in that way and held up as really, really
10 important people that have a voice is exactly the kinds of
11 things that need to happen in this country, so I think that
12 those are the kinds of things that I want to share.

13 You know, that there's work to do with the
14 Ministry of Children and Family Development around our
15 children.

16 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

17 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** There's -- the
18 epidemic right now across our country of the number of our
19 children who have been apprehended or are in the care of
20 the Ministry is greater than it was for residential school;
21 that's not okay. And that's women are losing their
22 children. And the hoops that they have to jump through are
23 unrealistic. I've been a part of that personally, as well
24 as professionally, so there's work to be done there. The
25 school district. The RCMP. You know, every level of

1 government. And so, you know, maybe part of that is
2 hearing the voices of strong women leaders.

3 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

4 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And you don't have
5 to have a title to be a leader. You know, there are so
6 many women out there that in their own right have their
7 story to share and how important that is because nobody
8 else can tell my story the way I can tell it. And so we
9 need to open up the space so that we can have that happen.

10 And then finally -- and it's not finally
11 because I've got all kinds of things to say, we need to
12 make a space for our men. It's so incredibly important.
13 You know, my [Family member] is a survivor of domestic
14 violence, and he as well perpetuated domestic violence
15 himself. But I can tell you, when he was that baby in my
16 arms and I looked down at him, that wasn't ever what I
17 thought would happen. And so he deserves that
18 consideration. He deserves to be treated in an honourable
19 way. He deserves to have people look at him and not make
20 judgment, because he's got his story too.

21 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yeah.

22 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so what are we
23 doing for our men? That's a really, really important part
24 of this as well.

25 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yeah.

1 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** So, you know, our
2 men are also victims.

3 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yes.

4 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so, you know,
5 I want to be able to speak to that as well. And, you know,
6 there's way too -- too -- there's few resources.

7 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

8 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** For those kinds of
9 supports and programs and, you know, all of those kinds of
10 things, including treatment centres and cultural centres,
11 and all of those kinds of things that will help to lift up
12 our people.

13 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

14 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Because that -- at
15 the end of the day, that's what's going to work, is lifting
16 up our people.

17 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And healthy men.

18 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Yeah.

19 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Healthy women.

20 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Healthy men,
21 healthy women, healthy children.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Children. Yeah.

23 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Right.

24 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yeah.

25 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Healthy culture

1 and communities.

2 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yeah. And I just -- just
3 want to offer an observation, if I can?

4 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** M'hm.

5 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** And it was when you spoke
6 to the Ministry, and particularly in B.C. it's called the
7 Ministry of Children and Family Development. And you talk
8 about the families and -- and -- and how they look at --
9 and perhaps maybe one of the pieces is -- is -- is shifting
10 a lens from the Indigenous families, putting the onus on
11 Indigenous families to prove that they're capable to take
12 care of the children that are in foster care, and rather
13 come from a lens that -- that they are capable.

14 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Yes.

15 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** As -- as part of a shift in
16 -- in -- in working with Indigenous people, rather than the
17 onus being on the family as a grandparent or as an aunt or
18 an uncle to have to prove that you're -- you're capable,
19 rather than coming from a lens that you are capable and --
20 and that's where.

21 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Yeah.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** So there's so many things
23 that could be done in --

24 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Yeah.

25 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** -- those institutional.

1 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Yeah, and I think
2 you know, like -- and perhaps this is final, for the
3 Ministry of Children and Family Development, when children
4 are removed from their family, you know, there's this focus
5 on these culture plans. Well, for most family, the
6 cultural plan is being in that family.

7 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Yes.

8 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Right. It's not
9 necessarily about the nation that you belong to, because
10 the cultural practices happen from within that family
11 because many of us don't live in a traditional way. Many
12 of us don't even live on reserve. We live in an urban
13 community. So we practice our cultural ways in a way that
14 makes sense within our family, and based upon our own
15 teachings. You know, so the way I am in a cultural way is
16 different than what my mother's cultural way was in some
17 respects.

18 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** M'hm.

19 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And it's different
20 certainly, I think, than what my grandmother would have
21 lived like. I never got to meet her. So there's got to be
22 some acknowledgment and honouring and respect for that. We
23 can't duplicate exactly, you know, the Cree way of doing
24 things in my home and, you know, or --

25 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

1 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** -- in -- in an
2 urban area. And so there needs to be some recognition and
3 honouring of that. Not following what Ministry says,
4 "Okay, this is what it's supposed to look like." Because
5 it might not look exactly like that --

6 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

7 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** -- in my home.

8 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

9 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** And so I think
10 that that's a really critical piece of that work. And
11 that's really what caused -- was one of the things that
12 caused me a lot of trauma and pain, and you saw the tears
13 earlier, was as a result of that, right. And not that
14 acknowledgment, and as family I know the story of my
15 family, and I know best.

16 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Right.

17 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** I think I might
18 know a little wee bit more than that social worker.

19 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Okay.

20 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** So those are my
21 recommendations.

22 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Well, thank you very much,
23 Barb, I appreciate the time that you've given this morning.
24 And we are in a public statement, so I'm going to close it
25 off. It's 11:47, and want to thank you once again for your

1 time.

2 **MS. BARBARA WARD-BURKITT:** Thank you so much.

3 **MS. KERRIE REAY:** Thank you. And we're still
4 on the record -- we're still on the 'til I turn this off.

5 --- Upon adjourning at 11:47 p.m.

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

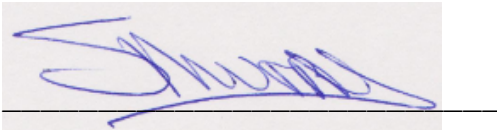
23

24

25

LEGAL DICTA-TYPIST'S CERTIFICATE

I, Shannon Munro, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.



Shannon Munro

November 3, 2018