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MEDIA STATEMENT

Thunder Bay, ON: (May 30, 2025)

“Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS) acknowledges the recent appointment of Stephanie MacLaurin as Senior Advisor, Indigenous Relations at the Thunder Bay Public Library (TBPL). While AETS has no specific concerns regarding the individual selected for this role, the organization views this development as a long-overdue and insufficient response to longstanding issues.

For over seven years, TBPL had the opportunity to work meaningfully with AETS through a formal partnership. That opportunity was not fully realized. This latest move, while perhaps well-intentioned, does not erase years of missed collaboration and unfulfilled potential in supporting Indigenous engagement and inclusion.

The AETS Board, management, and the nine First Nations we represent are deeply offended by the actions and conduct of Thunder Bay Public Library. We believe the Library Board and management have not been genuine in their communications with us. We’ve been subjected to a disrespectful lease termination process that undermines the cooperation and trust we have worked so hard to build over the years. This partnership was a cornerstone for Reconciliation in Thunder Bay, and we expected a much more thoughtful and respectful approach from what we considered our community partners.

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Thunder Bay Public Library repeatedly delayed meaningful and reasonable lease renewal discussions with our Board for over a year and has continued to stall transition negotiations for the past several months. On March 26, 2025, AETS was informed by the library's representatives that no financial offer would be made despite more than \$1 million of investment into the TBPL properties by AETS. As First Nations, we feel misled by both the City of Thunder Bay and Thunder Bay Public Library. This has caused significant disruptions to our operations, financial losses, and, most importantly, irreparable damage to the relationship between First Nations and the TBPL as well as the City of Thunder Bay.

AETS remains committed to advancing Indigenous employment, education, and cultural inclusion, and expects institutions in the region to demonstrate genuine, sustained commitment through action, not symbolism.”

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