

Public Note to Address Concerns Relating to Perception of Conflict of Interest

Chisasibi, November 19, 2024 - The Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) wishes to respond to certain concerns relating to the 2024 election of the CBHSSJB Chairperson in view of the Returning Officer, John Henry Wapachee, being the brother of one of the candidates, Bertie Wapachee (current Chairperson of the CBHSSJB).

The Returning Officer was duly appointed by the CBHSSJB Board of Directors in accordance with the CBHSSJB by-law governing this election. Chairperson Wapachee abstained from any deliberations of the Board and did not vote on the appointment of the Returning Officer for this election.

The Returning Officer has sworn an oath to act impartially and not to favor any candidate and he must ensure that the election is carried out properly and fairly. The Returning Officer is principally responsible for planning, coordinating and overseeing the election and related logistics.

Under the relevant Election By-law, Local Election Officers are responsible for counting ballots, not the Returning Officer. This includes counting ballots cast in advance polls and travelling polls, both for the main election that took place and for the upcoming run-off election.

All of these ballots are cast directly into ballot boxes and are only counted at the end of the main election day on November 12, 2024, and at the end of the main run-off poll (November 27, 2024).

Further, under the Election By-law, Local Election Officers count all ballots at end of this main poll or run-off poll in the presence of at least two witnesses and any scrutineers appointed by the candidates.

The Election By-law also provides that written polling reports from the Local Election Officers are then sent to the Returning Officer, who prepares a consolidated report on the election results in the presence of at least two witnesses. The written polling reports are also simultaneously transmitted to the James Bay Cree Communications Society (JBCCS) for Live-Streaming.

The candidates or their representatives may also be present when this consolidated report is prepared, pursuant to the Election By-law.

In the present circumstances and for the run-off poll scheduled on November 27, 2024, the CBHSSJB wishes to advise that:

- The Returning Officer will not be involved in any recount process under the Election By-law. Instead, in the case of a recount for the run-off, a Local Election Officer designated as a “Deputy Returning Officer” will be appointed to assume this role.
- The Returning Officer will also act jointly with the Deputy Returning Officer to support the Local Election Officers at polling stations.
- All written polling reports will be sent simultaneously by the Local Election Officers to:

- the Returning Officer and the designated Deputy Returning Officer;
 - the JBCCS; and
 - the CBHSSJB Corporate Secretary.
- The statement of election results will be co-signed by the Returning Officer and the Deputy Returning Officer.

The CBHSSJB is confident that the integrity and transparency of this election process will be ensured, further to a careful analysis of the situation and the Election By-law, including the tasks of the Returning Officer, the Deputy Returning Officer and Local Election Officers mentioned above and the other measures put in place.