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## Residential school denials not final

**Darren Bernhardt, Saskatchewan News Network; Canwest News Service**

Published: Thursday, February 14, 2008

SASKATOON -- Indian residential school survivors denied compensation shouldn't give up hope just yet, a federal government official said Wednesday.

Computer and human error may have resulted in some incorrect determinations on eligibility, acknowledged Gina Wilson, assistant deputy minister of the Office of Indian Residential Schools Resolution (OIRSR).

As well, some applicants may have been refused because the school they attended was not on the list approved by the settlement agreement.



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"We are working with the necessary parties in Saskatchewan to include all schools that meet the criteria of the agreement," Wilson told delegates at the winter session of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations' legislative assembly. That's why the government has established a reconsideration process to review applications. Failing that, applicants can appeal to a national administration committee comprised of representatives from government, the Assembly of First Nations, churches and lawyers.

Despite a few hiccups, the payout process has been going pretty smoothly, she said. Since September, the federal government has received more than 86,000 applications for the common experience payment (CEP), based on number of years a person spent at a residential school. They have processed more than 70,000 claims totalling more than \$1.2 billion.

The government estimated it would get about 14,500 applications from people in Saskatchewan but instead received 19,000. Of those, it has processed 15,000, which includes both those approved and declined, Wilson said.

Her department has also received complaints from individuals who were refused and those who believe their payments are less than expected.

"I understand there is anxiety and frustration," she said. "There are a lot of unhappy people."

But people must also recognize specific criteria must be met, Wilson said. Students who did not live at the schools, but attended during the day, are not eligible.

Some people may also be miscalculating their payments, confusing school years with calendar years. For example, if someone attended school from 1967 to 1969, that is not three years. It is two academic years: 1967-68 and 1968-69.

Other applicants may have been denied or delayed because their records were lost. Wilson said the OIRSR is trying to validate claims through former students' memories: Recollections of buildings they attended, fellow students and names of teachers.

"The benefit of the doubt will be given to the applicant," she said.

She urged chiefs at the assembly to let their band members know about a toll-free reconsideration line (1-866-565-4526) that can be called for more information or forms, also available online.

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