

**House of Commons**

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**Charlie Angus**

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Minister Jane Philpott  
Indigenous Services Canada  
Terrasses de la Chaudière  
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BY FAX : 613-992-3642

**Re: Crisis Facing Children in Kashechewan**

September 10, 2018

Dear Minister,

I am writing you with a sense of urgency, having just returned from meeting parents and children in Kashechewan. As you are aware, the local school authority, acting on advice from teachers and parents, has made the difficult decision to shut the portable classrooms. This decision was made following their attempts to get the classrooms ready for the coming school year. However, serious concerns about mould, unsafe conditions and the ongoing deterioration of the portables have necessitated the decision to shut these structures as fundamentally unfit for children.

When these portable structures were put in place ten years ago, INAC officials promised the community that these portables would be a mere “temporary” fix until a permanent school was built. At the time the community was told that there would be a five year period before the new school was constructed. But that promise wasn’t kept. And what was once temporary has become permanent. These buildings are in no way capable of handling the harsh conditions of the James Bay region.

During my visit, I witnessed:

- Buckling foundations
- Water filling up underneath the classrooms
- A heavy smell of mold in the rooms
- Floors that were uneven and doors that could not open or shut because of shifting ground.
- Numerous issues relating to deteriorating walls and conditions.

Teachers expressed their fears about electrical problems with faulty wiring and walls that overheated while other heaters regularly failed in winter. They spoke of children having to wear winter clothing in the gym and the need to shovel snow and frost off the floor.

Parents spoke of their deep distress of children potentially losing a year of education, but their greater distress was that if they didn't take drastic action; your department would continue to leave these children in substandard and unacceptable conditions.

Community leaders have been told that the government is unwilling to invest in the infrastructure of a new school because the community is regularly flooded out every spring. Apparently your officials have said that your department doesn't want to "throw money in the water."

This reluctance would be understandable if your government was willing to put a concrete plan on the table to actually move the community. However, what we have seen is talk and promises without any clear timeline for actually moving the community. It's been 13 years since the agreement was signed to move the community and years of negotiating and study may be ahead.

Meanwhile your officials have offered only the most minimal of Band-Aids to a situation that has grown intolerable. If you don't want to throw money in the water, how is it possible to you would be content to leave children in this water and mold?

This past spring, the Auditor General stated that, under your watch, an "incomprehensible failure" in the area of First Nation education has continued. This is the direct result of the refusal of your department to establish equitable funding formulas, health and safety standards and educational investments as children in the provincial system receive.

If these conditions existed in any school in Ontario, these portables would be immediately shut down. And yet your own internal documents show that your officials believe they can get away with leaving children in these substandard building for decades to come.

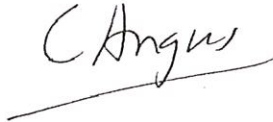
This is unacceptable. These children are worthy of a herculean effort to get them safe and quality education opportunities. The late Shannen Koostachin reminded us that children have only one childhood and when it is gone they can never get this opportunity back.

I am asking you to do everything in your power to save this school year for the children. This would require immediately sitting down with the community leaders and education authority to draft up a plan to establish a permanent school that meets provincial standards.

I also request that you reach out to experts in the provincial school system regarding establishing a credible health and safety standard. This would reassure the families that any solutions that are offered meet the standards that other children in Ontario take for granted. Anything less is a continuation of the pattern of systemic negligence and discriminatory funding practices that has led these children into this deplorable situation.

Minister, this is an urgent issue. I look forward to a strong and clear response. I look forward to working with you on a solution that will reassure the parents and families of Kashechewan First Nation.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C Angus". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

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Charlie Angus, Member of Parliament  
Timmins – James Bay

cc.      Leo Friday                      Chief, Kashechewn First Nation  
          Jonathon Solomon            Grand Chief, Mushkegowuk Council  
          Alvin Fiddler                    Grand Chief, Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
          RoseAnne Archibald            Ontario Regional Chief  
          Perry Bellegarde               National Chief, Assembly of First Nations  
          Guy Bourgouin                Member of Provincial Parliament, Mushkegowuk  
          Cindy Blackstock              Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society