

August 5, 2024

Dear clients, supporters, and community members,

I am writing this letter to all of you as Sovereign Bodies Institute's Founder and Executive Director, to share some important updates on our organization and work.

It has been a great honor to serve in SBI's leadership for over five years, and to see it grow and shift to meet the needs of Indigenous survivors of violence and MMIP families. Earning the trust of our people to be of service is the greatest honor one can achieve, and I am beyond thankful to have been given that gift - both as an individual, and for us as an organization.

I am also extremely proud of the work SBI and its team has done over the last five years - as a service provider, I know we have saved countless lives, and made more easier with the basic needs, advocacy, and healing support we offer. We created a model for international services provision that spans across colonial borders and definitions of indigeneity, set a standard for how to do research on violence against our peoples with families and survivors at the forefront, and still maintain the world's only international MMIP database that includes all genders and all Indigenous peoples.

That being said, much of that work has relied on an unsustainable workload on me as Founder and Executive Director, a standardized non-profit governance model that does not best suit our work, fiscal sponsors that don't have the capacity to support our work long-term, and dependence on philanthropy that is reluctant to fund direct services in a post-pandemic era. For all those reasons, we need time for an organizational reset. We are in the midst of transitioning to a new a fiscal sponsor that has generously shown us kinship and allyship, and offered to host us while we rebuild our organization as its own 501(c)3 non-profit. We are also creating and implementing a new strategic plan for an Indigenized governance model and less dependence on philanthropy. I am so thankful to our new Board, which has been very supportive and hands-on in these transitions, and I'm very excited for our path ahead.

In order to have time and capacity to make these changes for the long-term health of our organization and its programming, we are continuing our pause on direct services until we have the resources and staff capacity to offer them again. We are still available to provide case advocacy support to families and survivors, as well as emotional support and healing resources. Our weekly virtual bead circle for families and survivors will continue, and we will have equine-assisted wellness sessions available soon. However, we will not be able to provide basic needs or crisis support services in the near future. When we are able to offer those resources again (which we fully intend to do), we will share that announcement on our media. It pains us to continue this pause, knowing how many people benefit from our direct services program; however, this temporary pause means a more sustainable, healthy future for that part (and all) of our programming.

For years, Sovereign Bodies Institute has been a leader in the MMIP movement and a model for how to do this work in a good way. However, like most Native-led organizations addressing violence, it has been at the expense of staff/leadership wellness and long-term health of the organization. There is a culture of burnout in this movement and our communities overall, that specifically targets Indigenous women and LGBTQ2+ people. We are expected to soldier through for the sake of our people, and I know many of us have been told, “Make sure to rest, practice self-care! But also keep getting the work done,” even when it’s unsustainable or impossible to do both. Once again, it’s time for SBI to model something different.

Our new task is to figure out how to continue all the important work we do, while reinventing in such a way that fosters long-term sustainability and role models nurturing, investing in, and caring for our team that makes it possible, especially our leadership. I’m excited for us to have an opportunity to set a new standard for wellness culture in this movement, and to promote a shift from constant triage of crisis response and short-term emergency-based decision making, to a model rooted in deep change and long-term organizational health and sustainability.

Nea’ēšemeno (thank you all) for understanding, and for your continued support.

Annita Lucchesi  
Founder, Executive Director  
Sovereign Bodies Institute