

Statement by JSS Barristers regarding the Calgary Stampede's Response to Recent Media Coverage

CALGARY (July 31, 2023) – JSS Barristers is counsel for the plaintiffs in the certified class proceeding against Philip Heerema, Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Limited, and the Calgary Stampede Foundation, regarding the history of sexual abuse and misconduct by Mr. Heerema against members of the Young Canadians.

As class counsel, we are aware of a statement issued on July 28, 2023 by the President and Chair of the Board, and the Chief Executive Officer of the Calgary Stampede.

Unfortunately, the Calgary Stampede has chosen to react to media scrutiny by making an incomplete apology coupled with the suggestion that they “took immediate action upon learning of the allegations in 2014.” However, the uncontradicted evidence in the class action indicates that in 1988 there was a clear and specific complaint arising from Mr. Heerema’s sexual abuse, to a senior Stampede official, made by a member of the Young Canadians. This was not acted upon. Further complaints of impropriety were made involving Mr. Heerema, which should have been investigated, and which were apparently ignored.

The Calgary Stampede’s statement suggests that they “remain cooperative and responsive to the ongoing process.” In fact, the Stampede fought certification of this matter as a class proceeding until the last possible moment, and they then denied all liability, again until the last possible moment. This is outlined in the filed Brief of Argument of the Representative Plaintiff & the Certified Class, which is available here:

<https://jssbarristers.ca/class-actions/philip-heerema-and-calgary-stampede-foundation/>

Further, the Stampede has yet to pay any compensation to class members, many of whom have immediate needs arising from the abuse they suffered.

Carsten Jensen, KC, one of the JSS Barristers lawyers representing the plaintiffs in this matter, said: “I am very disappointed that the Stampede has chosen to make a public statement which includes a half-hearted apology tied to the idea that they acted in a timely way. The evidence does not support this statement, and no apology will be meaningful unless it is complete, genuine, and accompanied by appropriate compensation.”

He further said: “The Stampede should be talking to us about what steps they have taken internally to prevent this from happening again, about the form and content of a meaningful apology and how it should be delivered, and about appropriate compensation, rather than issuing self-serving public statements which further harm class members.”

JSS Barristers has only issued one prior public statement in this matter, also in response to a statement from the Stampede. In 2018 the Stampede said following the criminal sentencing of Mr. Heerema that they had provided support to the young victims after Mr. Heerema's arrest. In fact, many class members received no such support, and we issued a statement saying: "A number of our clients have been utterly devastated, and they have ongoing needs for support that have simply not been met. Some of our clients have received no support from the Calgary Stampede Foundation." Unfortunately, this remains true today.

JSS Barristers will not be making further comment on this matter at this time.

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