



Nishnawbe Aski Nation  
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GRAND COUNCIL  
**TREATY #3**  
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ANISHINAABE NATION IN TREATY #3



## NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday May 31, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **FIRST NATION LEADERS ADDRESS THUNDER BAY POLICING CRISIS AROUND RIVER DEATHS**

**TORONTO, ON:** First Nation leaders are taking action to address the policing crisis around river deaths in Thunder Bay, calling for the province to bring in an outside police force to investigate the deaths of three community members in the city's waterways, and a review and oversight of the Thunder Bay Police Services Board (TBPSB).

“The recent losses of Tammy Keeash and Josiah Begg have once again confirmed the inability of the Thunder Bay Police Service to conduct competent and credible investigations into the epidemic of deaths of NAN and Treaty No. 3 community members in Thunder Bay's rivers. This crisis of confidence in policing has led to the ongoing investigation into systemic racism in the force. We are dismayed by the dysfunctionality of the Thunder Bay Police Services Board, and have called for immediate action by the provincial authority over police boards – the Ontario Civilian Police Commission,” said Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, during a press conference today.

The body of 17-year-old Tammy Keeash, from North Caribou Lake First Nation, was found in the Neebing-McIntyre floodway on May 7, 2017. Less than two weeks later the body of 14-year-old Josiah Begg, of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, was also found in the river.

These followed the death of Stacy DeBungee, from Rainy River First Nation, who was found in the river on October 19, 2015. His death triggered a systemic review of racism in the TBPSB by the Office of the Independent Review Director (OIPRD).

“In the face of the OPP's refusal last fall to support our communities with an independent investigation into the Stacy DeBungee death, the logical next step is to bring in the RCMP with respect to the three latest river deaths including the DeBungee case. With all that has transpired to date, it is painfully obvious that the Thunder Bay Police cannot credibly investigate the river deaths,” said Grand Council Treaty #3 (GCT#3) Ogichidaa Francis Kavanaugh.

“We are applying for the immediate appointment of an administrator to oversee the Police Board and for a broader review of the Board's conduct and utter lack of leadership. As far back as last fall when the systemic racism review was announced, Rainy River First Nations along with the DeBungee family, went on record as formally inviting collaboration with Board members in moving forward with the systemic review. As Chief of my community, I was shocked to receive a blanket refusal (in writing) by the Board Chair to even meet with my Council and the family during the currency of the OIPRD review. This kind of bunker mentality is embarrassing for what is supposed to be the civilian oversight body of the police service,” said Rainy River First Nations Chief Jim Leonard.

This alliance of First Nation leaders has expressed their lack of confidence in the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS) to the Ontario Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, formally requesting the intervention of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to investigate these three deaths.

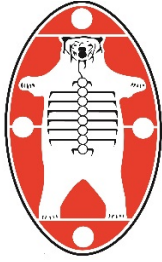
Leaders have also expressed a lack of confidence in the Thunder Bay Police Service Board to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (OCPC), requesting that the Commission exercise its powers to investigate and inquire into the administrative failures of the Board.

First Nation leaders are taking these unprecedented steps as:

- death investigations are extremely time sensitive, and each day that passes significantly impacts the ability of competent investigators to get at the truth about the river deaths;
- the crisis of confidence in policing felt by the Indigenous community will increase if concrete steps are not taken to acknowledge and address these fears; and
- the deaths of Indigenous people in waterways have reached a frequency and number that maintaining the status quo risks increasing the likelihood of another river death.

The affected families and First Nations of NAN and GCT#3 support and deserve an independent and professional investigation into these deaths. The RCMP is the best placed investigative agency to complete these investigations and provide a credible report. There is both precedent and legal authority under the *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act* to bring in the RCMP where a local police service is unable or unwilling to provide unbiased services.

The Ontario Civilian Police Commission is the statutory governing body for police boards in Ontario. The OCPC has the power to impose sanctions as severe as disbanding a police service, a police services board, or both. When faced with a dysfunctional board, the OCPC has the power to appoint an administrator to oversee the operations of the board.



## Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Nishnawbe Aski Nation represents 49 First Nation communities in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and Ontario portions of Treaty No. 5 – an area covering two thirds of the province of Ontario in Canada.



## Grand Council Treaty #3

Grand Council Treaty #3 is a political organization representing 28 First Nation communities across the Treaty 3 areas of northern Ontario and southeastern Manitoba.



## Rainy River First Nations

Rainy River First Nations, also known as Manitou Rapids, is a Saulteaux First Nation band government located in northwestern Ontario with approximately 1,200 members, and a member of GCT#3.

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