



# Rainy River First Nations

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## PRESS RELEASE

### OVERWHELMING EXISTENCE OF RACISM AT THUNDER BAY POLICE SERVICE

#### **DIRECTOR CALLS ON THUNDER BAY POLICE SERVICE TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT RACIST SERVICE**

The Ontario Independent Police Review Director released a 200-page report concluding that the evidence “overwhelmingly supports the existence of racism” at the Thunder Bay Police Service

Death investigations were “too often handled differently because the deceased was Indigenous”, finds OPIRD Director Gerry McNeilly.

The Director found that, “the inadequacy of Thunder Bay Police Service sudden death investigations that the OIPRD reviewed was so problematic that at least nine of these cases should be reinvestigated.” The recommendation to reopen these nine deaths will be difficult for the families, but this may represent the first time that these deaths have been taken seriously.

The Director has requested a six-month report, and annual report for the next three (3) years as to the progress of the Thunder Bay Police Service in implementing his office’s recommendations.

**Brad DeBungee** – “It has been over 3 years since I lost my brother Stacy. I could feel in my heart from the first day I dealt with a police officer that he treated me and my family differently because we are Indigenous. Now the proof is out, and they must answer for this.”

**Chief Robin McGinnis, Rainy River First Nations** – “Rainy River First Nations is committed to supporting each and every family in our communities. What the DeBungee family has been put through by the TBPS is unforgiveable. The findings by the Director that there is overwhelming evidence of racism at the Thunder Bay Police Service vindicates this long battle. We look forward to hearing the leadership of the service provide the acknowledgments of the existence of racism that the Director has recommended. We would like to go forward in a good way, but that can only be done if the leadership of the Thunder Bay Police Service, both the Chief and the Board, admit the existence of racism against our people and a commitment to fix it.”

“We want to hear from the TBPS that it is ready to make a change in the way they do business. The Report requires the TBPS to report annually to the OIPRD on its progress until 2021. If there is no evidence of compliance with this requirement, Rainy River First Nations will be calling for the service to be disbanded.”

**Jim Leonard, Former Chief of Rainy River First Nations** – “These findings have been a long time coming. The conclusion in the report that “systemic racism exists in the Thunder Bay Police Service at an institutional level” is an indictment of the entire leadership. If they are going to get their house in order, they need to acknowledge their problems and become accountable. We wrote the Board, offering to work with them, and they refused. Perhaps now, they will want to work with us.”

**Julian Falconer, counsel to Brad DeBungee and Rainy River First Nations** – “The findings of this OIPRD Report are absolutely unequivocal regarding the widespread nature of racism that is rampant at the TBPS. The report is unprecedented. I have never seen a report of an entire police force on this level with these findings.”

*For further information, please check Falconers LLP website at [www.falconers.ca](http://www.falconers.ca), or contact Odi Dashsambuu of Falconers LLP during business hours at 416-964-0495, extension 248.*