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Letter to the Thunder Bay Police Service and Thunder Bay Police Services Board regarding systemic discrimination and racism

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October 27, 2016

Chief J.P. Levesque
Thunder Bay Police Service
1200 Balmoral Street
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5Z5

Board Chair Jacqueline Dojack
c/o Secretary-Thunder Bay Police Services Board
Office of the City Clerk
500 Donald St. E., 3rd Floor City Hall
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 5V3

Dear Chief Levesque and Chair Dojack,

It was a pleasure to meet you, Chief Levesque, and Deputy Chiefs Hay and Hauth on October 6. Thank you once again for your hospitality and candour.

During the meeting, we discussed concerns that leaders and members of the Indigenous community brought to my attention earlier in the day; namely, alleged racism and systemic discrimination within the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS). We discussed more generally the relationship between the TBPS and Indigenous communities in light of recent events.

During our meeting, Chief Levesque, you reaffirmed your public commitment to cooperate fully with the upcoming investigation into systemic racism in the TBPS by the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD). We also discussed some nascent ideas that the TBPS is considering to enhance its internal capacity to address human rights-related issues.

As expressed at the meeting, I welcome the TBPS's commitment to cooperate with the OIPRD investigation. However, in addition, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) believes that the allegations of racism and systemic discrimination within the TBPS require proactive, immediate, and independent steps to build confidence and trust in the TBPS.

I am writing today to encourage the TBPS and the TBPS Board to undertake proactive efforts to develop and sustain organizational capacity to address human rights concerns. In this regard, we would direct you to the OHRC's guide on [Human Rights and Policing: Creating and Sustaining Organizational Change](#). This guide was developed based on years of experience working with police organizations across Ontario. It details many approaches that have been found to be valuable in developing and sustaining organizational human rights capacity in policing. In particular, it isolates the following key components of an effective human rights organizational change strategy:

- A comprehensive organizational change approach;
- A unified, committed and involved leadership;
- An articulated vision and shared terminology;
- Empowered and capable lead change agents;
- A multi-stakeholder structure and process for change;
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation;
- Ongoing communication and reporting;
- Identifying and planning for resistance; and
- Choosing strategic "areas of focus" for change (such as service delivery to Indigenous peoples).

As a first step, we encourage the TBPS Chief and TBPS Board Chair to publicly commit to a coordinated, time-bound, and appropriately resourced human rights organization change project. Such proactive steps would be consistent with your ongoing obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, and may lead to diminished tensions between the Indigenous community and members of your service.

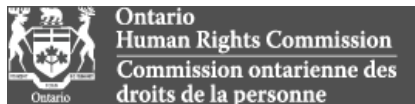
Of course, the OHRC would be willing to further discuss efforts at human rights organizational change at your convenience. Please feel free to contact my office in this regard.

Sincerely,

Renu Mandhane, B.A., J.D., LL.M.
Chief Commissioner
Ontario Human Rights Commission

cc: Hon. David Orazietti, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services
Hon. Yasir Naqvi, Attorney General
Gerry McNeilly, Independent Police Review Director
OHRC Commissioners

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