

## Human rights chief praises police oversight report's focus on race and diversity

Justice Michael Tulloch recommended Ontario police oversight bodies reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.



Many of the recommendations from Justice Michael Tulloch were aimed at increasing the transparency of Ontario's police watchdogs. (RENE JOHNSTON TORONTO STAR / TORONTO STAR) | [ORDER THIS PHOTO](#)

By [WENDY GILLIS](#) News reporter  
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The provincial government's commitment Thursday to require police watchdogs to collect race-based statistics is evidence Ontario is in "a very unique moment" when it comes to recognizing the need for such data, says Ontario's chief human rights commissioner.

One day after the release of Ontario Justice [Michael Tulloch's broad-ranging report](#) on police oversight in Ontario, Renu Mandhane said the judge's work provides a detailed road map to rebuild trust between community and police oversight agencies at a time of "historic levels of distrust."

Shortly after the release of Tulloch's 129 recommendations — many aimed at increasing transparency within the police watchdogs — Ontario Attorney General Yasir Naqvi committed to act on the key recommendation that civilian oversight bodies, including the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), begin collecting demographic data such as statistics on race, ethnicity and indigenous status.

Currently, none of Ontario's civilian watchdogs — the SIU, the Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) and the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (OCPC) — collect statistics on race or any demographic data on religion, age, mental health status, disability, or indigenous status of complainants and alleged victims.

That move shows "the conversation has shifted in terms of [the collection of data](#)," Mandhane said in an interview Friday, but stressed the importance of ensuring the data is both collected and then publicly reported; Tulloch recommended an advisory board be established to develop "best practices on the collection, management, and analysis of relevant demographic data."

"There needs to be real thought about who is going to receive the data and making sure they have the resources to effectively analyze the data," Mandhane said.

Tulloch's race-based statistics recommendation was one of several praised by rights groups and advocates, who appreciated the emphasis placed on diversity, cultural training and the focus on indigenous

communities. The report states Ontario's oversight bodies must be "both socially and culturally competent."

During consultations with First Nations communities in particular, Tulloch said there was consensus that the oversight bodies "lack cultural sensitivity and often are disrespectful of Indigenous peoples." During consultations, he was told of cases where an SIU investigator arrived in a First Nations community following an incident, spoke briefly with someone from the community, and had no further contact.

"Equally troubling, some First Nations communities in the north described having to wait days for SIU investigators to arrive on scene. In some cases, matters were closed without talking to members of the community and the leadership," the report states.

To begin to remedy fraught relationships, Tulloch recommended mandatory social and cultural competency training for watchdog staff — developed and delivered in partnership with the communities they serve.

The report also says Ontario's police watchdogs should reflect their diverse communities, meaning the oversight bodies must take initiatives to hire people from communities currently under-represented within the organizations.

"This includes all individuals at the oversight bodies: the directors, the investigators, the adjudicators, and the staff dedicated towards outreach, communications, administration, affected persons services, and so forth," the report states.

The move toward greater diversity is long overdue, said Julian Falconer, a Toronto lawyer who has represented many families of people killed by police and who also practices in Thunder Bay.

In his submission to Tulloch during the review process, he says he was "quite blunt" about the lack of diversity when it comes to the director of the SIU.

“Why for 25 years was it only a white male Crown attorney . . . who could do the job?” Falconer said.

Many of Tulloch’s recommendations were aimed at increasing the transparency of Ontario’s police watchdogs. Naqvi committed to taking immediate action on key elements of the report — including the release of all past and future SIU director’s reports — but did not commit to the wholesale implementation of the report, saying his ministry needed time to review it.

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