

Thunder Bay police chief charged with breach of trust

The OPP have charged Thunder Bay police Chief J.P. Levesque with breach of trust and obstructing justice following a five-month-long investigation.



Thunder Bay Police Chief J.P. Levesque has been charged by Ontario Provincial Police with breach of trust and obstructing justice following a five-month investigation. (THUNDER BAY POLICE)

By [JACKIE HONG](#) Staff Reporter
Tues., May 23, 2017

The Ontario Provincial Police have charged Thunder Bay Police Service Chief J.P. Levesque with breach of trust and obstructing justice.

The charges come following a five-month long investigation into “allegations of criminal wrongdoing,” the OPP said in a press release Tuesday.

According to the release, the RCMP O-Division requested the OPP “to conduct an external, independent and thorough investigation,” which was conducted by OPP’s Criminal Investigation Branch.

The release did not state what spurred the RCMP to request the investigation nor the circumstances that led to the charges being laid against 53-year-old Levesque, who has served as Thunder Bay’s police chief since July 2011.

In a media release, the Thunder Bay Police Services Board said it was aware of the charges but that it was “to date limited information regarding the nature of these charges,” adding that Levesque is currently off work on medical leave.

“The public can be assured that the members of the Thunder Bay Police Service will continue to serve and protect our community,” the release said. “We have full confidence in Deputy Chief Hauth and our Senior Command staff to lead the TBPS through this challenging time.”

Both the OPP and the police board said they will not be making further comment as the case is before the courts.

Levesque is scheduled to appear in a Thunder Bay court June 13.



Lawyer Julian Falconer, who is representing the DeBungee family, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and Chief James Leonard of Rainy River First Nations in a review of Thunder Bay police. (TANYA TALAGA/TORONTO STAR)

The charges come as the Office of the Independent Police Review Directorate, a provincial watchdog, [is examining the police force](#) for “systematic racism” in its handling of cases of murdered and missing indigenous people after complaints by First Nations leaders. In particular, the review is focusing on police investigations into the deaths of 41-year-old Stacey DeBungee, whose body was found in the Thunder Bay river in 2015 and those of [seven indigenous students](#) who died in the city between 2000 and 2011. The review was recently expanded to include the disappearances and deaths of a 17-year-old girl and 14-year-old boy [earlier this month](#).

In eight of those deaths, the bodies were recovered from city rivers.

Lawyer Julian Falconer, who is representing the DeBungee family, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and Chief James Leonard of Rainy River First Nations in the review, told the Star Tuesday that Levesque is entitled to the presumption of innocence, but charges aside, indigenous communities’ confidence in Thunder Bay police has turned into an “an utter catastrophe.”

“All I hear from my clients is the concern that there is no investigative agency in the city of Thunder Bay that they can trust to competently investigate the deaths at the rivers because of the trail of calamities and failures by the Thunder Bay police, and this is quite apart from this current revelation,” Falconer said. “So as I say, if there was a crisis before, there’s now a full catastrophe as there’s simply no credibility for indigenous communities in relation to policing in Thunder Bay.”

Falconer was also critical of the media release by Thunder Bay Police Services Board concerning the charges against Levesque – in particular, the Board stating it would not be offering further comment.

“There’s tremendous irony to that since the Thunder Bay Police Services Board has been conspicuous, utterly conspicuous, by their failure to make any public comment, period, in relation to the systemic review,” he said. “There’s true irony that they would announce today that they will still do exactly what they’ve been doing all along – show an utter lack of leadership.”

With files from Tanya Talaga